



ROUTLEDGE  
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# The Routledge Handbook of Byzantine Visual Culture in the Danube Regions, 1300–1600

Edited by Maria Alessia Rossi  
and Alice Isabella Sullivan



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# THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF BYZANTINE VISUAL CULTURE IN THE DANUBE REGIONS, 1300–1600

This volume aims to broaden and nuance knowledge about the history, art, culture, and heritage of Eastern Europe relative to Byzantium. From the thirteenth century to the decades after the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the regions of the Danube River stood at the intersection of different traditions, and the river itself has served as a marker of connection and division, as well as a site of cultural contact and negotiation.

*The Routledge Handbook of Byzantine Visual Culture in the Danube Regions, 1300–1600* brings to light the interconnectedness of this broad geographical area too often either studied in parts or neglected altogether, emphasizing its shared history and heritage of the regions of modern Greece, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, and Czechia. The aim is to challenge established perceptions of what constitutes ideological and historical facets of the past, as well as Byzantine and post-Byzantine cultural and artistic production in a region of the world that has yet to establish a firm footing on the map of art history.

The 24 chapters offer a fresh and original approach to the history, literature, and art history of the Danube regions, thus being accessible to

students thematically, chronologically, or by case study; each part can be read independently or explored as part of a whole.

**Maria Alessia Rossi**, PhD, is an Art History Specialist at the Index of Medieval Art at Princeton University. She is the author of *Visualizing Christ's Miracles in Late Byzantium: Art, Theology, and Court Culture* (2024). She also co-edited *Late Byzantium Reconsidered: The Arts of the Palaiologan Era in the Mediterranean* (2019), *Byzantium in Eastern European Visual Culture in the Late Middle Ages* (2020), and *Eclecticism in Late Medieval Visual Culture at the Crossroads of the Latin, Greek, and Slavic Cultural Spheres* (2021). Rossi is the co-founder of the initiative *North of Byzantium* and the digital platform *Mapping Eastern Europe*.

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We conceived of this Handbook as a way to broaden and nuance knowledge about Byzantium and its legacy by looking at its history, art, culture, and heritage in relation to, and from the point of view of, its northern neighbors situated along the Danube River. We put out a call for papers for this project in 2020 and carefully selected contributions that engaged with local traditions and the broader interconnectedness of the regions of the Danube, especially relative to Byzantium. In an effort to broaden the scope and thematic purview of the project, we also invited other colleagues to contribute. The resulting 24 chapters offer an in-depth examination of the visual and cultural production of the area, navigating local traditions, the Byzantine heritage, and cultural forms adopted from other models while challenging established perceptions of what constitutes Byzantine and post-Byzantine artistic and cultural production in the period between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries.

In order to ensure a cohesive outcome for this publication, we wanted to give our authors the opportunity to hear and read each other's chapters, as well as to offer feedback ahead of publication. As a result, the contributions could speak to one another and redirect readers to relevant topics throughout the Handbook. In May 2022, we organized a closed-door workshop—which shifted online due to the COVID-19 pandemic—with all

the contributors plus invited guests. Each author circulated their essays before the workshop, gave a presentation, and engaged in discussion at the event. Afterward, each speaker received written feedback from us plus two other colleagues. We are grateful to our authors for participating in this event, presenting their research, engaging in cross-disciplinary dialogue on different topics, and sharing their feedback and comments with other presenters.

This volume would not have been possible without the generous financial support of several institutions and organizations: Tufts University; the Society of Historians of East European, Eurasian and Russian Art and Architecture (SHERA); the Volkswagen Foundation; the Mary Jaharis Center for Byzantine Art and Culture; the American Institute for Southeast European Studies (AISEES); and the St. Archangel Michael Serbian Orthodox Church of Akron Ohio Endowment Fund of the Resource Center for Medieval Slavic Studies and Hilandar Research Library at The Ohio State University (Columbus, Ohio).

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This volume builds on our ongoing efforts to spotlight the history, art, and culture of Eastern Europe, as well as encourage its study and appreciation among students, researchers, and colleagues from around the world. This is the third volume that we have co-edited together in recent years, following *Byzantium in Eastern European Visual Culture in the Late Middle Ages* (East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450–1450, 65) (Leiden: Brill, 2020) and *Eclecticism in Late Medieval Visual*



*Culture at the Crossroads of the Latin, Greek, and Slavic Traditions* (Sense, Matter and Medium: New Approaches to Medieval Material and Literary Culture 6) (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022). To complement these scholarly efforts, we realized the need for a volume that could be used as a foundational text for the study, teaching, and research of the area. So, we narrowed down the geography with a focus on the Danube regions and offered art-historical overviews for key centers and case studies that could easily be read and understood by both specialized and broad audiences.

These projects extend the reach of our *North of Byzantium* initiative ([www.northofbyzantium.org](http://www.northofbyzantium.org)), which is a project that we launched in 2018 with an initial three-year grant from the Mary Jaharis Center for Byzantine Art and Culture. Through annual events, publications, and other resources, this initiative addresses issues of visual eclecticism in art and architecture, patronage, and the transfer of artistic ideas and styles, and it charts how cross-cultural exchange operated in regions of the Balkan Peninsula, the Carpathian Mountains, and further north, which developed at the crossroads of competing cultural spheres in the Middle Ages and the post-Byzantine period. As with our other efforts, we hope that this volume, too, will encourage current and future generations of students and scholars to delve into the rich material and textual evidence in order to question the nuances of cultural contact and interchange across Eastern Europe.

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# Introduction

Maria Alessia Rossi and Alice Isabella Sullivan

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For much of the Middle Ages and into the post-Byzantine period, the regions of the Balkan Peninsula, the Carpathian Mountains, and beyond stood at the intersection of different and competing traditions, among them the Latin, Greek, Slavic, and Islamic. Yet Byzantium, with its cultural legacy and spiritual power, offered some of the most influential artistic, literary, religious, and political models to be used and adapted in local contexts, in this case to the north of the Byzantine Empire. In highlighting local specificity as well as the interconnectedness and shared heritage of this geographical area, the collection of essays in this Handbook challenges established perceptions of what constitutes ideological and historical facets of the past, as well as Byzantine and post-Byzantine cultural production in the regions of the Danube River in Eastern Europe.

This Handbook focuses attention on the relationship between Byzantium and the Danube regions between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. This relationship takes many forms, including instances of transmission, adaptation, negotiation, or eclecticism, and it informs our understanding of the role of these territories of Eastern Europe that are often neglected in scholarship and little known outside of local circles. Specifically, we designed this Handbook with three main aims: first, to present Byzantium in dialogue with other regions while redefining what this looks like. The Danube regions were not passive recipients of Byzantine culture or the legacy of the Byzantine Empire. Instead, these territories were active players, negotiating on their own terms their histories as well as artistic and cultural production. Second, we wanted to focus on the Danube in order to allow the geography of the territory to speak instead of imposing twenty-first-century categorizations and labels. This major river in Europe—the continent's second largest—has long been a key marker on the topography, informing local developments, and it has served both as a connector and a divider. Our third and final aim is to structure the contents of this

Handbook in such a way as to make them accessible and engaging to a broad audience. In fact, we have been working since 2018 to bring Eastern Europe, or the regions to the north of Byzantium, to the forefront of art-historical discussions.<sup>1</sup> This volume complements our efforts by creating a solid foundation for anyone interested in the region: the art-historical overviews offer in-depth discussions of the state of the research of key areas that then allow the specific case studies covered in the other chapters to be understood better and contextualized.

Specifically, at first glance, this volume does not seem to reflect the structure of a traditional Handbook. But what a Handbook does is offer clear and straightforward teaching tools to the reader and it is our aim to reach this same goal by using a slightly different format. [Chapter 1](#), the art historical overviews in the first section, and the selected bibliography at the end of the volume introduce readers to a basic knowledge of the artistic production of the region in light of the historical complexities and historiographical issues. The next three sections allow readers to delve into specific case studies showcasing the dynamism and cultural complexities of the region, as well as the original and interdisciplinary research of individual scholars and team of experts. Since Eastern Europe and the Danube regions in the period under scrutiny here are often neglected in Medieval Studies and Byzantine Studies, this volume offers introductions and tools for research, while revealing how vibrant the research and teaching potential can be in this area.

## **Byzantium in Dialogue**

Whereas Constantinople and the Byzantine Empire have been at the center of scholarship for a long time, the relations of Byzantium and its northern neighbors have been little explored. The northern regions of the empire, located in present-day Eastern Europe, broadly conceived, have been studied within limited geographical, political, and temporal frameworks and never with the same interest and emphasis. Within the field of Byzantine Studies, these territories have been regarded as “peripheral” and often have been taken into account only as examples of “places of influence.” But Eastern Europe, in fact, offers a key to understanding how


the Byzantine heritage was transmitted, continued, and transformed before and after the fall of Constantinople in 1453. The histories, cultures, and artistic productions of the territories of the Danube, ranging from modern-day Serbia to Slovakia and from Croatia to Romania, developed at the intersection of different cultural and religious traditions, but they are all notably indebted to those of Byzantium.

The aim of this multiauthor, interdisciplinary volume is to broaden knowledge about Byzantium and look at the historical, intellectual, cultural, and ideological legacies of the empire from the point of view of its northern neighbors in the period between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. As such, the temporal parameters of this volume span the decades before and after the fall of the Byzantine Empire, demonstrating aspects of both continuity and transformation. The year 1453, which has for long served as a cutoff date for the study of Byzantine and, more broadly, medieval culture, is here treated within a continuum. The territories of Eastern Europe and the Byzantine legacy continue to live on and develop after 1453. What this volume demonstrates is that bridging the medieval and early modern periods, as well as the Byzantine and post-Byzantine periods, and engaging them in conversation, can be extremely fruitful.

## **The Role of the Danube**

The terminology used for the regions of Eastern Europe often in itself creates limitations to the ways in which these territories have been approached and studied. Eastern Europe, East-Central Europe, and South-Eastern Europe have implicit connotations and have been used to include as much as to exclude different territories for political, religious, and socioeconomic agendas. Similarly, the Balkans has been used as a label for the regions to the south and north of the Danube, and while it is appropriate for the former, it is not for the latter. Within this volume, we wanted to offer an alternative by focusing on a specific region of Eastern Europe and defining it by its geographic characteristics, in this case, the Danube River. But why the Danube? By leaving aside the political categorizations and the borders of modern-day countries, the 24 chapters in this volume explore the many different roles of the Danube as connector and divider, as much as a place for trade and transmission as a site of contention.

The Danube River flows from southern Germany, through Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova, and Ukraine to reach the Black Sea ([Map 0.1](#)).<sup>2</sup> It has long connected Europe through navigation, trade, and commerce with far-reaching corners of the world. But the river has also served as a divider, marking boundaries between great powers and empires. In antiquity, it demarcated the northern borders of the Roman Empire. Beginning in the fourteenth century, many powers across Eastern Europe competed for control of the Danube, but the Ottoman Empire succeeded in establishing it as its northern border for several centuries. Today, too, parts of the Danube are division lines: it forms the southern border of Slovakia and Hungary, it marks a border between Serbia and Croatia, and it separates Romania from Serbia and Bulgaria. The geography is as complex now as it was during antiquity and the Middle Ages.<sup>3</sup>

 A map shows the River Danube passing through Bavarian Duchies, the Duchy of Austria, the Kingdom of Hungary, Siberia, the Principality of Wallachia, and the Second Bulgarian Empire.

[Map 0.1 Map of the Danube regions ca. 1400.](#)

Source: Richard Thomson | [www.rt-imagery.com](http://www.rt-imagery.com).

In scholarship, too, the Danube has served as a marker of connection and division, as well as a site of cultural contact and negotiation. In *Architecture in the Balkans*, Slobodan Ćurčić clearly states that his definition of the Balkans will be exclusively geographic, using the physical space and terrain as a demarcation of the territory: the Adriatic Sea and the Ionian Sea to the west; the Mediterranean, Aegean, and the Sea of Marmara to the south; the Black Sea to the east; and the Danube and Sava rivers to the north. The use of the Danube as a divider, in this instance, was a challenging choice since Ćurčić himself states, “Culturally, these two late medieval entities [Wallachia and Moldavia] were intimately linked with contemporary developments in the Balkans.”<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, these connections are not explored in his monumental study.

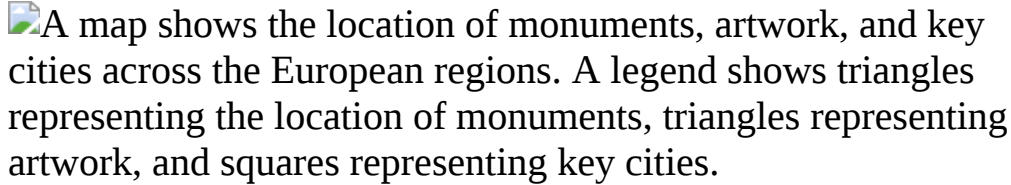
On the opposite end, Robert G. Ousterhout, in his noteworthy contribution *Eastern Medieval Architecture: The Building Traditions of Byzantium and Neighboring Lands*, attempts to place in conversation architectural developments to the north and south of the Danube, thus supplementing Ćurčić's efforts. In Chapter 26 of his book, Ousterhout discusses "regional diversity" by looking at the architectural traditions of Bulgaria, Serbia, and Romania relative to Byzantium. Although each region negotiated in a local context, Byzantine traditions were mediated directly and indirectly, and each also developed a local architectural and visual idiom. As Ousterhout concludes: "While their late medieval predecessors had looked to Byzantine architectural forms for imagery that connoted power, authority, or sanctity, the new nations often sought to distance themselves from Byzantium, to focus on what was truly 'theirs.' One wonders if the inhabitants of the late medieval Balkans [and Carpathians] would have viewed these monuments similarly—that is, as regionally specific political signifiers—or whether religious affiliation outweighed national or ethnic identity."<sup>5</sup> In architecture, as in art and other cultural facets, the connections among the regions to the north and south of the Danube are apparent and worth analyzing, as is the local specificity and contacts with Byzantine traditions, especially in the periods before and after the fall of the empire in 1453.

Similar notions of connectivity around the Danube are explored in two other noteworthy titles. Alina Payne, in [Part Three](#) of her book *The Land Between Two Seas: Art on the Move in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, 1300–1700*, emphasizes the Danube as a connector, as a place of exchange, renewal, and transformation. The essays in this section demonstrate that access to the Danube allowed for the establishment of trade routes, the transportation and proliferation of commodities, and the cooperation and cohabitation of faiths and cultures. As Payne explains, "This liminal zone was neither periphery nor center but a world onto itself, more flexible and elastic in manners, tastes, and even faiths, and that it belies the simplistic binary view of East and West, Christian and Islamic, and high and low with which history writing has traditionally defined it."<sup>6</sup> A similar echo of connectivity is found in the volume *Across the Danube: Southeastern Europeans and Their Travelling Identities (17th–19th c.)*, edited by Olga Katsiardi-Hering and Maria A. Stassinopoulou.<sup>7</sup> Although

its focus is on the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, and thus on a period after the one covered in our volume, the notions of contact and exchange, the establishment of commercial networks and local communities, as well as issues of cultural and religious relations across the Danube, demonstrate the continuation and transformation into the modern period of key issues that our volume addresses for the earlier centuries.

## How to Use This Handbook

The contributions to this book fall under four main thematic sections: “Art-Historical Overviews,” “Contacts and Patronage Beyond Borders,” “Ideals and Ideologies in Images and Texts,” and “Adaptations and Transmissions Across Media and Geographies.” Before delving into a chapter overview, we would also like to offer suggestions for how this Handbook could be used. The chapters in the “Art-Historical Overviews” section could be used in introductory courses or as preliminary research to get a sense of the region in question, its artistic production, and how it has been studied to date. These chapters offer overviews that set the stage, so to speak, for the contributions that follow. Readers can get started learning about the regions of the Adriatic and those to the north and south of the Danube in Eastern Europe, Hungary, and Slovakia. [Chapter 1](#), moreover, plays an introductory role by focusing on the historiographical issues and debates of the region. Also devised as a teaching tool is the “Selected Bibliography” at the end of the volume that gathers the most important scholarly contributions cited in the book, allowing readers and teachers to use this easily in the classroom and for research. These specific publications provide the general understanding of a particular region's historical picture, which the compelling case studies in the remaining chapters amplify, nuance, and complicate. Readers can also engage with the Handbook by media, type, or geography, depending on whether they want to learn more about monumental art and architecture, textile production, manuscripts, or metalwork or whether they want to focus attention on a particular region, be it Serbia, the Romanian principalities, or the Adriatic ([Map 0.2](#)).

A map shows the location of monuments, artwork, and key cities across the European regions. A legend shows triangles representing the location of monuments, triangles representing artwork, and squares representing key cities.

[Map 0.2 Map of the works of art and monuments illustrated in the volume.](#)

Source: Richard Thomson | [www.rt-imagery.com](http://www.rt-imagery.com).

This Handbook aims to highlight the most recent scholarship on key facets of the history, art, and culture of the Danube regions relative to Byzantium and other traditions, but, of course, more work remains to be done. A comprehensive study of Byzantium and the Danube area would require hundreds of chapters to tell a multitude of local stories and highlight the plethora of material and textual evidence. But that is not possible within the scope of this project. Nevertheless, this Handbook offers overviews, exemplary case studies, as well as methodological and theoretical approaches that could help guide and expand future studies on the rich history, art, and culture of Eastern Europe in the late medieval and post-Byzantine periods.

## Overview of the Chapters

The various sections of this volume, detailed later, are preceded by [Chapter 1](#), which contextualizes the twentieth-century historiographic concept of “Byzance après Byzance.” As Ovidiu Cristea and Ovidiu Olar explain, this concept has continued to stimulate scholarship on the legacy of Byzantium beyond the borders of the empire in the so-called post-Byzantine period across regions of Eastern Europe, especially in the Romanian principalities to the north of the Danube River, with some contributions challenging and others promoting this paradigm.

The “Art-Historical Overviews” section includes six chapters that detail historiographical concerns and methodological approaches to the study of art, architecture, and visual culture in select regions of the Balkans and the Carpathians, including the Adriatic coast, Serbia, Wallachia, Moldavia,



Transylvania, and Slovakia. These overviews are not exhaustive but offer glimpses into art-historical approaches and key monuments of study that we hope will sit at the foundation of future work in these and adjacent regions. In [Chapter 2](#), Margarita Voulgaropoulou examines the reception and development of Byzantine pictorial forms in regions of the Adriatic, which were promoted through commercial and diplomatic contacts, as well as the circulation of Eastern Christian icons and the movement of icon painters. Artistic traditions were thus modified to cater to local Catholic and diasporic Eastern Christian groups, depending on the desires of the patron and the skill of the artist, resulting in new visual vocabularies that intermingled Western and Byzantine styles and iconographies. This chapter, moreover, engages with key issues of terminology, unpacking aspects of Adrio-Byzantinism, eclecticism, and hybridity. Nearby, in the Serbian cultural context, as Jelena Bogdanović, Ljubomir Milanović, and Marina Mihaljević demonstrate in [Chapter 3](#), the artistic and architectural production between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries developed at the nexus of Byzantine, Latin, and Slavic domains, with evident impact from the Islamic cultural sphere in the later periods. The indebtedness to Byzantine artistic models, both direct and mediated through regions of the Balkans, is evident in the art and architecture of Wallachia, as well. As Elisabeta Negrău demonstrates in [Chapter 4](#), the visual culture of Wallachia was mainly informed by Byzantine conventions between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, as evident in architecture, painting, and the decorative arts. But whereas Byzantine forms are more apparent in the earlier period, by the sixteenth century the visual culture of Wallachia offers a local adaptation of Byzantine, Balkan, East-Central European, and Ottoman models based on the desires of the patrons and the skills of the artists employed. A similar scenario is evident in the principality of Moldavia, as Vlad Bedros details in [Chapter 5](#). The Moldavian artistic production similarly exhibits a plurality and eclecticism with respect to sources, being indebted to Byzantine and Western medieval models adapted in a local context. Moving to the West of the Carpathian Mountains, [Chapter 6](#) shifts attention to the Kingdom of Hungary, offering a brief historical overview of the region and a historiographical overview of the Byzantine elements in local wall paintings. Aspects of Byzantine visual culture, as Zsombor Jékely explains, were mediated in this region from Byzantium and through regions of Italy and other parts of Central Europe. The final chapter in this

section, [Chapter 7](#), looks at the visual culture of modern Slovakia, the impact of Byzantium on icon painting, and the extant mural cycles found in Gothic churches. In this region, as Vladislav Grešlík explains, Byzantine culture was experienced directly in this region for much of the Middle Ages; in the post-Byzantine period, it was mediated through regions of the Balkans and the Carpathians, including western Ukraine. All of these chapters reveal the role of Byzantium in shaping local artistic traditions, but since these regions developed at a crossroads, other models also left an imprint. The modes of transmission and adaptation in local contexts, however, remain open to debate and research. These contributions, moreover, touch on local historiographic conventions, underscoring the opportunity for new readings and perspectives that this material invites of future researchers.

The second section of the volume, “Contacts and Patronage Beyond Borders,” follows the same geographical path as the first part, moving from the Adriatic to the Balkans, the Carpathians, and parts of East-Central Europe, exploring various aspects of patronage informed by contact with Byzantium. In [Chapter 8](#), Iva Jazbec Tomaić and Danijel Ciković look at silk patronage in the eastern Adriatic with a particular focus on luxurious embroidered liturgical objects created for the local social elites that demonstrate Byzantine and later Ottoman artistic styles and techniques. The patrons, in this case, had significant financial power, access to top artists, and selective tastes. Moving from economic and artistic concerns related to patronage to legal frameworks, [Chapter 9](#) demonstrates relationships between texts, laws, and architectural projects relative to patronal figures, as well as how the Byzantine canons and texts were appropriated in a local Serbian context. In this chapter, Anna Adashinskaya details issues of patronage within and across social borders in the Serbian cultural context prior to the creation of the Serbian patriarchate in 1346, which shifted the structures of interaction between the ruler and Church officials in matters of monastic patronage. [Chapter 10](#) moves to the north-Danubian principalities and examines how the rulers of Wallachia and Moldavia established ongoing contacts with the monasteries on Mount Athos and Mount Sinai, offering recurring monetary gifts and donations, which, in turn, helped promote aspects of Byzantine spirituality, culture, and art in these Carpathian regions. These contacts, as Alice Isabella

Sullivan explains, were facilitated not only by patrons but also by the individuals who traveled between these centers to deliver the gifts and donations. Figures as key agents of contact and exchange are also the topic of [Chapter 11](#), in which Marco Cassioli examines economic relations and the activities of Greek merchants in the Genoese Lower Danube. They facilitated contacts across the Black Sea, connecting parts of Eastern Europe to regions in Asia Minor. [Chapter 12](#) demonstrates that Transylvania's visual culture, as evident primarily in wall paintings, shows aspects of east-west transmission between competing traditions and lived realities. Whereas the murals of the Orthodox churches emulate Byzantine stylistic and iconographic patterns, the elite donors represented in them chose to assimilate elements of the Western-infused culture that dominated most of Transylvania due to the institutional presence of the Hungarian Kingdom. The donors, as Elena-Dana Prioteasa argues, thus negotiated between East and West in their modes of self-fashioning, adapting Byzantine and Western models for their personal Orthodox desires. Further considering the direct and indirect mediation of Byzantium, [Chapter 13](#) looks at icon painting and stone incrustation (both mosaic and opus sectile) in Prague. As Jana Gajdošová demonstrates, Charles IV manipulated the ancient past to fit his new ruling ideologies through his patronage of icons, as well as the decoration of spaces of Prague Cathedral. Drawing on textual sources and material evidence, these chapters contextualize various facets of patronage in regions of the Danube, demonstrating how the heritage of Byzantium was adopted, mediated, and transformed in local contexts.

The third section of the volume engages with “Ideals and Ideologies in Images and Texts.” In [Chapter 14](#), Andrei Dumitrescu addresses notions of ruling ideology and the monarchic institution in the post-Byzantine Moldavian context through analyses of key visual representations of princely portraits, depictions of Christ, and their spatial organization in the interiors of churches. The contribution details local interpretations of Byzantine and Balkan visual forms and meanings, while aiming to refine understandings of the religious construction of political legitimacy after 1453. Moving from the Moldavian to the Wallachian cultural context and from the second half of the fifteenth century to the initial decades of the sixteenth century, [Chapter 15](#) examines the relationship between ethics, piety, and politics in the text known as the *Teaching of Neagoe Basarab to*

*His Son Theodosie*. This text, as Ioana Manea explains, adapts aspects of the Byzantine tradition of mirrors of princes to shape local ruling ideologies in the Wallachian context. In [Chapter 16](#), Zofia A. Brzozowska shifts attention to images, particularly the representation of Sophia—the personification of divine wisdom—in the southern Slavic context. Rare in Byzantine art, this iconographic type became popular in regions to the south and north of the Danube River in the late Middle Ages, becoming intimately tied to monastic contexts and ideals. Bringing the religious and the secular in dialogue, [Chapter 17](#) examines the relationships between political ideology and spiritual connections in the Serbian cultural context relative to Byzantium. Irene Caracciolo looks at the legitimizing role of Saint Nicholas as a dynastic saint in the various hagiographies of Stefan III Uroš Dečanski (r. 1321–31) and their pictorial manifestations. Finally, [Chapter 18](#) analyzes textual sources to explain how the Eastern Romans (or Byzantines) and the Bulgarians perceived each other in the decades after the Fourth Crusade. Grant Schrama demonstrates that these perceptions oscillate between difference, stereotype, and communal identity. The chapters in this section make use of text and image to complicate our understanding of the political, social, and religious ideals of these territories in relation to Byzantium. These take the form of shared iconographies imbued with different meanings at different times and the circulation of written texts to analyze local perceptions as well as ruling ideologies.

The final section, “Adaptations and Transmissions Across Media and Geographies,” explores visual and textual evidence of cross-cultural contacts, transmission, and exchange in the Danube regions with examples spanning from metalwork to paratexts and from architectural trends to textiles. [Chapter 19](#) addresses issues of terminology in the study of the cultural heritage of Eastern Europe and the visual eclecticism of local metalwork relative to Byzantine, Western medieval, and Islamic traditions in the decades after the fall of Constantinople in 1453. Anita Paolicchi focuses on the adaptability of metalwork and identifies networks of contacts that developed across Eastern Europe at this time, which facilitated the movement of artists, ideas, and objects. These enabled new visual forms and adaptations across media to emerge, contributing to new stylistic features and technical innovations. Turning attention to textiles, Nikolaos Vryzidis in [Chapter 20](#) examines textiles and sartorial traditions in

the regions of the Balkans and the Carpathians and how these were informed by Byzantine, Central Asian, and Persian traditions in terms of style, iconography, and technique. [Chapter 21](#) shifts attention to architecture. Serena Acciai contextualizes the development and proliferation of overhanging rooms in the houses of the Danube region relative to competing traditions in the East and West. The final three chapters focus attention on key aspects of medieval texts. [Chapter 22](#) examines the Alexander Romance and its transmission through manuscripts from Byzantium throughout the Slavic cultural contexts, with examples preserved in repositories to the north and south of the Danube River. Antoaneta Granberg demonstrates that regions of the Balkans and the Carpathians adapted this Byzantine text for local use but shared a similar transmission of the text. The text appealed to both secular men and clerics and was often enhanced with secular and religious additions. Transmission is also a key theme of [Chapter 23](#), in which Małgorzata Skowronek shows how the text of the *Palaea Historica* was transformed in different South Slavic contexts, combining various genres and styles, including biblical narratives, liturgical poetry, and polemical statements, among others. Finally, [Chapter 24](#) looks at small literary forms or paratexts found in South Slavic manuscripts, arguing for their standard codicological, paleographic, and cultural value. Izabela Lis-Wielgosz and Ivan Petrov assert that such notations offer insight into the individual, the community, or the region that used and adapted a particular text.

## Outcomes and Future Directions

By examining the cultural production of the territories to the north and south of the Danube, the 24 chapters in this volume deepen our understanding of this river as a connector as much as a divider; the Danube was a site of mediation, transformation, adaptation, and contention. The role of Byzantium and its legacy through texts and images are at the heart of this volume. Through examinations of the surviving sources, each chapter challenges our understanding of what is Byzantine in the Danube regions, where Byzantium ends (be it before or after 1453), and where we can start identifying local trends and negotiations. These territories are not discussed in a vacuum: Byzantine, Western, Slavic, and Islamic traditions

are involved, revealing a much more complex and eclectic reality than previous scholarship has often assumed. Furthermore, what emerges from the explanations and analyses is the importance of local connections and cultural contacts: borders were shifting constantly, people and objects were moving, and boundaries were not as fixed as sometimes presumed. In fact, Byzantine, Western, Slavic, and even Islamic models all made their way directly into the Danubian region and were mediated by local contexts.

We designed this volume to complement Florin Curta's *The Routledge Handbook of East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 500–1300*, which explores the complex history and culture of the regions of Eastern Europe, including those around the Danube River, in the centuries preceding our efforts.<sup>8</sup> This present volume continues Curta's story, while bringing to the fore the richness of the extant textual and visual sources and the various modes of their interpretation and contextualization. Together, these two Handbooks could serve as a strong foundation for the study of Eastern Europe in the classroom and among diverse audiences.

## Notes

1. [Maria Alessia Rossi and Alice Isabella Sullivan, eds., \*Byzantium in Eastern European Visual Culture in the Late Middle Ages\* \(East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450–1450, 65\) \(Leiden: Brill, 2020\)](#); Maria Alessia Rossi and Alice Isabella Sullivan, eds., *Eclecticism in Late Medieval Visual Culture at the Crossroads of the Latin, Greek, and Slavic Traditions* (Sense, Matter and Medium: New Approaches to Medieval Material and Literary Culture, 6) (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022). These projects are connected to our broader initiative titled *North of Byzantium* and its related digital project, the *Mapping Eastern Europe* website.
2. [The Danube River originates in the town of Donaueschingen, in the Black Forest of Germany.](#)
3. [See Karl Möseneder, Michael Thimann, and Adolf Hofstetter, eds., \*Barocke Kunst und Kultur im Donauraum\* \(Petersberg: Michael Imhof, 2014\).](#)

4. [Slobodan Ćurčić, \*Architecture in the Balkans: From Diocletian to Suleyman the Magnificent, 300–1550\* \(New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010\), 4.](#)
5. [Robert G. Ousterhout, \*Eastern Medieval Architecture: The Building Traditions of Byzantium and Neighboring Lands\* \(New York: Oxford University Press, 2019\), 676.](#)
6. [Alina Payne, ed., \*The Land between Two Seas: Art on the Move in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, 1300–1700\*, \*Mediterranean Art Histories: Studies in Visual Cultures from Late Antiquity to the Modern Period\* 5 \(Leiden: Brill, 2022\), 20.](#)
7. [Olga Katsiardi-Hering and Maria A. Stassinopoulou, eds., \*Across the Danube: Southeastern Europeans and Their Travelling Identities \(17th–19th c.\)\* \(\*Studies in Global Social History\* 27/09\) \(Leiden: Brill, 2016\).](#)
8. [Florin Curta, ed., \*The Routledge Handbook of East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 500–1300\* \(London: Routledge, 2022\).](#)

# 1

## *BYZANCE APRÈS BYZANCE*

### The Paradigm

*Ovidiu Cristea and Ovidiu Olar*

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In the fall of 1934, about two hundred delegates attended the Fourth International Congress of Byzantine Studies, which was held in Sofia. Some of the greatest Byzantinists of the time were among them. However, several leading scholars were missing, most notably Charles Diehl, Josef Strzygowski, and N. Iorga.<sup>1</sup> Whereas the first two did not attend due to personal reasons, Iorga's absence had an ideological motivation: the Romanian historian boycotted the congress to voice his profound disagreement with ideas expressed by the most important Bulgarian historian of the time, Petăr Mutafchiev. Iorga and Mutafchiev disagreed on every single aspect of the medieval history of the Balkans: the process of Romanization, the continuity of the Roman population in the Balkans and, especially, north of the Danube, the first Bulgarian Empire and its territorial expansion, the second Bulgarian Empire—particularly the “Vlach” origin of the Assenid dynasty, the Byzantine legacy in the Balkans, and so on. There was a historiographical clash fueled by recent political developments such as the involvement of Romania against Bulgaria in the Second Balkan War.



In Sofia, Iorga intended to present “general considerations” on an “endearing” phenomenon called “Byzantium after Byzantium,” that is, the survival of Byzantium long after the fall of the imperial capitals Constantinople, Mystra, and Trebizond in the mid-fifteenth century.<sup>2</sup> The subject interested him for several years. Motivated by the setback, he decided to turn his intended contribution to the congress into a monograph. Written in French and titled *Byzance après Byzance*, the volume was published by the Institute of Byzantine Studies in Bucharest in 1935.<sup>3</sup>

Although it generated several reviews, mostly in international journals, *Byzantium after Byzantium* attracted rather limited attention.<sup>4</sup> The first serious discussion of the ideas expressed therein dates to 1945, when Vitalien Laurent dedicated a paper to Iorga calling him the “historian of Byzantine life.”<sup>5</sup> The French scholar tried to overcome a certain reticence towards Iorga's contributions in the field of Byzantine history and placed his ideas in a wider intellectual and historiographical context. Still, many contested Iorga's argument. According to the Romanian medievalist Petre P. Panaitescu, “The Greek culture did not penetrate the Romanian lands due to the survival of the Byzantine ideas, but due to the predominance of the rich Greeks in the cities of the Ottoman Empire.”<sup>6</sup> However, in spite of the initial reluctance and of the critical reactions, the book became a classic of Romanian historiography. In 1971, Bucharest hosted the Fourteenth International Congress of Byzantine Studies. The same year, in order to celebrate one hundred years since Iorga's birth, the Institute for South-East European Studies of the Romanian Academy published an edited volume on Iorga as “historian of Byzantium,” which included a chapter on *Byzantium after Byzantium*.<sup>7</sup> The leading Greek Byzantinist Dionysios A. Zakythinos discussed Iorga's take on the issue in the journal of the International Association of South-East European Studies.<sup>8</sup> *Byzantium after Byzantium* itself was first re-edited and then translated into Romanian.<sup>9</sup>

In Romania, the renewed interest in Iorga's paradigm fueled major historiographical contributions.<sup>10</sup> By far the most important is Andrei Pippidi's monograph *The Political Byzantine Tradition in the Romanian Lands from the 16th to the 18th Century*, which should have been one of five installments in a series entitled “Byzantium and the Romanian Principalities.”<sup>11</sup> The author contrasted ideals and realities and showed that

the “Byzantine tradition” was not about the survival of Byzantium among the Romanians but about Byzantine forms and aspirations in the former European part of the empire (Serbia, for example), as well as in Georgia.<sup>12</sup> Inescapably, Iorga's *Byzantium after Byzantium* generated excessive hypotheses, too, including, for instance, the existence of a “Christian crypto-empire” under Ottoman domination.<sup>13</sup> It also stirred controversy. Speaking about “forms without content,” Daniel Barbu argued that the Byzantine forms never generated a fondness in the Romanian principalities; consequently, their presence had less to do with continuity and more with “Byzantium against Byzantium.”<sup>14</sup>

The *Byzance après Byzance* paradigm continued to trigger debates, as proven, for example, by the 2010 survey published by the Institute for Defense Policy Studies and Military Historical of Bucharest.<sup>15</sup> But despite the book being re-edited and translated into Greek and English, its echo outside Romanian historiography remained rather feeble.<sup>16</sup>

On the one hand, Iorga's major objective—to define better the place of the Romanians in southeastern Europe (*Byzantium after Byzantium* mentions Moscow several times but only in passing, which should tell us something about Iorga's rationale and focus point)—collided with other paradigms, fueled by divergent “scholarly politics of region making.”<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, the title has taken over the content. Few read the book and even fewer place it in its immediate historiographical and cultural context, but many use the title as if it were self-sufficient. For example, Iorga assigns to the Ottoman Empire a major role in the survival and transmission of the imperial idea. Still, “Byzantium after Byzantium” is often understood in plain chronological terms, as the period ranging from 1453 to 1821. Furthermore, this reading, as a period and not as a phenomenon, is sometimes used as a tool to avoid references to the Ottoman rule in southeast Europe.

The aim of this chapter is to reflect on the potential and limits of the *Byzance après Byzance* paradigm. We consider, first, Iorga's argument as expressed in the 1935 monograph, and then we focus on the case studies of the Romanian principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia, addressing the question of their “Byzantinism” in the first couple of centuries of their existence as states. The choice to focus on the fourteenth and fifteenth

centuries was driven by the fact that from the sixteenth century onward, the growing Ottoman control and the revival of the ecumenical patriarchate added new layers to an already complicated picture.<sup>18</sup> The Ottoman conquest of the Balkans and the symbolic fall of Constantinople turned out to be a game changer: they transformed Wallachia and Moldavia in outposts of Orthodoxy, thus facilitating the transfer of the role of protectors of the Holy Places from the Byzantine, Bulgarian, and Serbian rulers to the Romanian princes. However, the Christian elites integrated themselves into Ottoman networks, while the “Great Church” became an Ottoman institution. This gradual process had less to do with the survival of Byzantium and more with imagined versions of it. Finally, we argue that the survival of the idea of Byzantium represents but one aspect of the convoluted and entangled history of the “post-Byzantine” world, especially in the Eastern European context.

### **The History of Byzantine Life and Its Continuation**

In 1934, Iorga published a three-volume *Histoire de la vie byzantine*.<sup>19</sup> Subtitled “Empire and Civilization,” the book represented a synthesis of decades-long research in the field. The seed had already been planted in 1907, when the Romanian historian wrote *The Byzantine Empire*, his first history of Byzantium, with a focus on the development of Byzantine life “in all its length and breadth and wealth.”<sup>20</sup> In between, Iorga had published a plethora of studies, monographs, and reviews and had been the driving force behind the first-ever International Congress of Byzantine Studies, organized in Bucharest in 1924. On the one hand, he wanted to vindicate “one of the greatest civilizations of the world” against the medievalists who disrespected it and the historians who ignored it.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, he firmly believed that the history of the Eastern Roman Empire was closely linked to the history of Southeastern European nations in general and to the history of the Romanians in particular.

The first volume of the *History of Byzantine Life* covered the “Ecumenical Empire (527–641)”; the second dealt with the “Middle Empire of Hellenic Civilization (641–1081)”; the third part was dedicated to the “Western” invasions and their consequences (1081–1453). Iorga insisted

that all volumes were based on sources and that he wanted to write an account of the “development of Byzantine life,” not an annotated chronology.<sup>22</sup> In addition, he wanted to treat Byzantine history as part of world history.

Typical of Iorga, the *History of Byzantine Life* was composed in a particular style and made several intriguing observations, some of which triggered strong reactions. For example, Raymond Janin disagreed with the author's ideas about the Church and its social role.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps one of the most exciting of these observations can be found on the very last pages. The fall of Constantinople under the Ottomans, Iorga briefly states, did not mark the end of Byzantium, because Byzantium was an idea and “ideas survive all disasters.”<sup>24</sup>

To this Byzantium, which could not and did not disappear with its capitals, Iorga dedicated a separate volume. Entitled *Byzantium after Byzantium*, the new monograph was “a continuation” of the *History of Byzantine Life*, as the subtitle clearly and modestly stated.<sup>25</sup> Iorga started by presenting his definition of Byzantium. According to him, it was a “complex of institutions,” a “political system,” a “religious formation,” and a “type of civilization,” which included “the Hellenic intellectual legacy, Roman law, the Orthodox religion,” as well as all its artistic consequences.<sup>26</sup>

Then, he explained how this Byzantium, composed of culture and institutions, survived for centuries, mostly in the Balkans. First, there were the émigrés, those who preferred exile to Ottoman rule. Many of them helped spread the knowledge of Greek, thus contributing to the intellectual and cultural development of Western Europe. Then there was “the permanence of Byzantine forms” in Constantinople, where the sultans acted as continuators of the emperors they had replaced, while maintaining elsewhere local autonomies.

Iorga further assigned a major role to the ecumenical patriarchate, which was restored shortly after the fall of Constantinople.<sup>27</sup> However, he paired this Byzantium of the “Church” with a Byzantium of the “Archons,” the representatives of Greek families with remarkable careers in the Ottoman realm. And he connected both to the Romanian Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia. Two chapters are dedicated to the “Byzantine Imperial Idea

through the Romanian Principalities” and to the “Romanian Princes’ Protection of the Byzantine Church and Civilization.” Another chapter deals with the “Renaissance through School,” also focusing on Wallachia and Moldavia, two tributary states of the Ottomans that conserved significant prerogatives and had Christian rulers.

The long eighteenth century, dominated by the Phanariots—the Greek-speaking Orthodox elites located in Constantinople, among whom were selected the grand dragomans of the Ottoman Empire and the princes of Wallachia and Moldavia<sup>28</sup>—finally brought the Byzantine idea to an end.<sup>29</sup> The rise of nationalistic ideas and especially the 1821 Greek Revolution marked the death of Byzantium.<sup>30</sup> The “open structure,” which had outlived by four centuries the “Christian imperial form,” and by 1400 years the “initial Roman form” could not resist outer and especially inner pressures any longer.<sup>31</sup>

According to Iorga, who continued his crusade for Byzantium and for Byzantine history, the feat had been impressive. As the historian himself has once stated, Byzantium “performed many miracles and especially that of lasting” (*fit beaucoup de miracles, mais surtout celui de durer*).<sup>32</sup> However, addressing the issue of the “Byzantinism” of the Romanian principalities was not an easy task.

Apparently, everything seemed obvious. As Dimitri Obolensky's classic *The Byzantine Commonwealth* (1971) pointed out, with the foundation of the Romanian principalities in the fourteenth century, “the church and culture of Constantinople became dominant in those lands, and the Rumanians made their belated entry into the Byzantine Commonwealth of nations.”<sup>33</sup> Although it is difficult to disagree with Obolensky's conclusion, it is less clear how exactly the Byzantine model was adopted and assimilated in Wallachia and Moldavia and how it became dominant. A long and tortuous sentence included by Iorga in his *Byzantium after Byzantium* underlined that the two principalities were situated at the crossroads of different cultures, thus being opened to various influences.<sup>34</sup> This approach implies, however, that the Byzantine influence was but one among others, its preeminence being established gradually through various agents and mechanisms.

Even more striking, the diffusion of the Byzantine model north of the Danube was always mediated. It was filtered through the Kingdoms of Bulgaria and Serbia, the direct contact with the Byzantine Empire being sporadic and incidental at best. Thus, a brief overview of the early relations between Wallachia, Moldavia, and Byzantium—represented by the late empire, the Church, and the monastic community of Mount Athos—allows us to better grasp Iorga's stance on the adoption of a Byzantine model in the Romanian principalities, directly and indirectly, and on Byzantium's survival in the regions of the Danube River.

### **Byzantium and the Romanian Principalities: Wallachia (Fourteenth to Early Sixteenth Centuries)**

Since the fourteenth century, the foreign policies of Wallachia and Moldavia were dominated by relations with the Kingdom of Hungary. While other political actors—the Golden Horde, Bulgaria, Serbia, and Poland—also impacted the evolution of the two principalities, the diminished Byzantium remained a remote political actor. The fact that Old Slavonic and not Greek was the language officially adopted by the chancelleries and the Churches of Wallachia and Moldavia underscores a paradox: the Romanian principalities became a part of the Orthodox “commonwealth,” but their belonging to the Slavonic cultural sphere limited the influence of Constantinople and the Greek language.<sup>35</sup>

Furthermore, there is no documented exchange of embassies between Constantinople and the princes of Wallachia and Moldavia in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and the precise moment when Byzantium acknowledged the emergence of the new principalities remains to be determined. It was assumed that the alliance between the Emperor Andronikos III Palaiologos (r. 1328–41) and the Bulgarian Tsar Michael III Shishman (r. 1323–30) paved the way for Wallachian-Byzantine contact due to the alliance between Michael III and the founder of the Wallachian principality, Basarab I (r. ca. 1310–52).<sup>36</sup> Although plausible, the hypothesis needs further documentary support. Until then, the first certain contact between the Byzantine Empire and Wallachia seems to have taken

place during the reign of Prince Nicholas Alexander (r. 1352–64), son and successor of Basarab I.

A decision of the Holy Synod and a patriarchal letter to the prince, both dated 1359, mention the diplomatic contact established in the previous years with the aim to create a metropolitan Orthodox see in Wallachia, under the jurisdiction of the patriarchate of Constantinople.<sup>37</sup> As the letters suggest, the initiative belonged to the Wallachian prince who tried to secure patriarchal support for the translation of Hyakinthos, the metropolitan of Vicina, to the Wallachian court. It was a very specific request, the synodal decision underscoring that the prince wanted “no one else” other than the metropolitan of Vicina. The demand was eventually granted by the ecumenical patriarchate on condition that Hyakinthos's successors were appointed by the patriarchate only and not following a request of the Wallachian princes. In 1359, Hyakinthos was already at the Wallachian court; it seems, therefore, that the princely intervention was the result of a long and close collaboration between the prince and the Orthodox prelate.<sup>38</sup>

The creation of the Wallachian Church in 1359, when Hyakinthos was appointed metropolitan of “Ungrovlachia,” is generally considered a turning point, which marked a decisive break with the Catholic Kingdom of Hungary.<sup>39</sup> Unfortunately, we know nothing about the aftermath of Hyakinthos's transfer to Wallachia. The relationship with Hungary may have worsened, but there is no hint of the contacts between Constantinople and the newly created Metropolitan see.<sup>40</sup> The situation is also blurred by the lack of consistent evidence and context for several important events that occurred during the fourteenth century. We know, for instance, that at one point the patriarchate of Constantinople established another metropolitan see in Wallachia, at Severin, in the western part of the realm.<sup>41</sup> The situation seems to have generated serious tensions, but the reasons behind this decision remain obscure.

A document written in 1370 by the first appointed metropolitan of Severin, Daniel Kritopoulos, points to strains between the Wallachian court and the patriarchate.<sup>42</sup> Kritopoulos pledged to respect and honor Hyakinthos and to refrain from any action, which could have harmed his superior. One may assume that there was a certain rivalry between the two main Wallachian hierarchs, but a letter sent in the same year by Hyakinthos

to the patriarch of Constantinople, Philotheos Kokkinos, hints at a more complicated situation. According to Hyakinthos, there were some tensions between the Great Church and the newly founded Wallachian Church, as well as between the patriarch and the prince of Wallachia, Vladislav I (r. 1364–77). The motives are rather obscure, but it is possible that the ecumenical patriarchate tried to impose its control on the Wallachian Church. On the one hand, the 1359 synodal act firmly stipulated that the appointment of the Wallachian hierarchs was the prerogative of the patriarchate. On the other hand, the Wallachian princes invoked as precedent the 1359 decision of the Holy Synod to comply with Nicholas Alexander's request. In 1370, the advanced age and the illness of Hyakinthos imposed the election of a successor. The stake of the clash between the patriarchate and the Wallachian prince was probably the appointment of a new metropolitan.

That the first interactions between the Constantinopolitan patriarchate and Wallachia were difficult is confirmed, albeit indirectly, by the first contacts between Wallachia and the monastic community of Mount Athos, which was under patriarchal jurisdiction.<sup>43</sup> Despite the generous donations made by Nicholas Alexander and Vladislav I to the Koutloumousiou Monastery, its superior, Chariton, refused to approve the request for a more lenient lifestyle for the monks coming from Wallachia.<sup>44</sup> The foundation documents issued by Chariton reflect the complicated relationship between the Wallachian patron and its client, an Athonite monastic community. Despite his refusal to oblige his benefactor, Chariton was appointed metropolitan of Wallachia, probably with Vladislav I's consent, in 1372.<sup>45</sup>

The relation between Wallachia, the ecumenical patriarchate, and Mount Athos in the last decades of the fourteenth century is even less known. The involvement of Athanasios, metropolitan of Severin, in the scandalous election of Matthew I as patriarch of Constantinople (in October 1397) and then in Matthew's reappointment (in June 1403) offers some clues.<sup>46</sup> Was Athanasios's participation endorsed by the Wallachian prince Mircea I “the Elder” (r. 1386–1418)? Until 1402, the Byzantine Empire and Wallachia had a common enemy—the Ottoman Empire; still, after the outbreak of a fratricidal war between Bayezid I's sons, their policy toward the former enemy changed. The Byzantine emperor Manuel II Palaiologos and the



Wallachian prince supported different pretenders to the Ottoman throne. Both claimed the city of Mesembria, besieged in 1409 by the Ottoman pretender Musa Çelebi, backed by a strong Wallachian contingent.<sup>47</sup>

This episode of the Byzantine-Wallachian conflict remains obscure; one can, however, infer that until 1453, Byzantium played an ambiguous role in the history of Wallachia. The empire was an important source of legitimation, used by the Wallachian princes to counterbalance the political and cultural influence of Hungary. Yet the relations with the empire, which are barely known, seem quite strained at the beginning of the fifteenth century, while the main channel for the diffusion of the Byzantine forms was the Church. Despite the quarrels with the ecumenical patriarchate and Mount Athos over certain ecclesiastical aspects, the Church remained the main factor that led to a progressive integration of Wallachia in the “Byzantine Commonwealth.” The expansion of the Byzantine Church beyond the fluctuating borders of the Byzantine State and the disappearance of the Kingdoms of Bulgaria and Serbia enforced this process, which will be further strengthened by the Ottoman advance in southeast Europe and the transformation of the patriarchate of Constantinople into an Ottoman state institution.<sup>48</sup>

### **Byzantium and the Romanian Principalities: Moldavia (Fourteenth to Early Sixteenth Centuries)**

Unlike Wallachia, Moldavia may have had direct political contacts with Byzantium. According to a sixteenth-century Ragusan historian, the founder of the Moldavian principality, Bogdan I (r. 1363–67), received the title of “King” from the “Emperor of the Greeks.”<sup>49</sup> The lack of details calls for skepticism.<sup>50</sup> However, in 1716, Dimitrie Cantemir stated that an early fifteenth-century Moldavian prince, Alexander “the Good” (r. 1400–32), received the title of “Despot” and a diadem from the Emperor John VIII Palaiologos.<sup>51</sup>

Although the claim has been rejected in modern historiography, recent contributions suggest that there is some truth to this historical detail.<sup>52</sup> In 1464, the Italian humanist Francesco Filelfo informed Cardinal Jacopo Ammannati Piccolomini that John VIII Palaiologos passed through

southern Moldavia and its most important port city, Cetatea Albă, on his way back to Constantinople from his trip to Venice and Hungary.<sup>53</sup> Filelfo did not mention an encounter between John VIII and the Moldavian prince in 1423–24, but the meeting may have actually taken place. A contemporary ecclesiastical embroidery depicting Alexander “the Good” gives him the title “autokrator” and alludes to him controlling the Black Sea coast.<sup>54</sup> The title's Byzantine resonance and the prince's headgear, similar to the one worn by John VIII, were invoked as indicators of a meeting between emperor and prince.<sup>55</sup> However, such hypotheses need to be further substantiated. The same is true with regards to the emperor's direct involvement in the establishment of a Moldavian Church: all the documents on the matter were issued by the patriarchate; there is no indication whatsoever of an imperial intervention.<sup>56</sup>

These documents point to the creation of a metropolitan see. However, the patriarchate refused to accept Joseph, the candidate suggested by the Moldavian prince, and appointed its own. Since the parties failed to compromise, Joseph, the prince, and the Moldavians were excommunicated. After long and tortuous negotiations, which lasted until 1401, the conflict was eventually solved. The Holy Synod of the Great Church accepted Joseph as metropolitan of Moldavia. As the Ottomans besieged Constantinople, the synod's decision may have intended to secure the support of Alexander “the Good.”<sup>57</sup> Constantinople was saved by the Mongols, victors against Bayezid I at Ankara, in 1402. As for the Moldavian Church, it kept a certain distance with regard to the ecumenical patriarchate. In 1415, for instance, the relics of St. John the New, a local saint, were translated from Crimea to Suceava, Moldavia's capital. The sumptuous ceremony organized by Prince Alexander—“a confirmation of the recently re-established legitimacy of the Moldavian Church”—took place without the involvement of the Great Church.<sup>58</sup>

Was there a gulf between the two institutions and did it become wider after the fall of Constantinople? The issue was a source of bitter dispute among historians.<sup>59</sup> In 1505, Prince Bogdan III (r. 1504–17) refused Patriarch Joachim I access to Moldavia, forcing him to take a turn to neighboring Wallachia.<sup>60</sup> Still, in 1513, Patriarch Pachomios I visited both Wallachia and Moldavia.<sup>61</sup> Despite the fact that the Moldavian Church was

under Constantinopolitan jurisdiction, the Moldavian ruler accorded clear preference to Pachomios and not to Joachim, which is indicative of the nuanced nature of the relationship in question.

As for the patronage of Mount Athos, a 1416 document concerning Zograf Monastery places it during the reign of Alexander “the Good.”<sup>62</sup> The prince is called “autokrator,” which clearly shows that the title was not granted to him by the Emperor John VIII in 1423–24. And his decision to support the Athonite monastic community was not necessarily fueled by an “imperial idea”; it was a pragmatic decision, which aimed at the strengthening of the monastic life in Moldavia and, especially, Bistrița Monastery, Alexander's main foundation.<sup>63</sup>

In assuming the role of protectors of the Holy Mountain, the Wallachian and Moldavian princes did not merely imitate the Byzantine emperors. Their ties with Mount Athos predated the fall of Constantinople and the aim of their patronage was twofold: to secure the salvation of their souls (and of the souls of their relatives) by means of liturgical commemorations and to enhance their legitimacy as members of the “Orthodox Commonwealth.”<sup>64</sup> By extension, they followed in the footsteps of the Byzantine emperors.<sup>65</sup>

In both Wallachia and Moldavia, the “Byzantine model” was, first and foremost, promoted by the Church. Yet it was more an interpretation than a smooth adoption and a difficult one at times. The princes, the patriarchs, and the representatives of the Athonite communities had their own agendas, which most often than not were at odds with each other. The ambiguous nature of the sources leaves room for suppositions. It may be assumed that until the end of the fifteenth century, the mediation of Bulgaria and Serbia was paramount (more research on this topic is needed). Nevertheless, the Ottoman expansion and consolidation in the Balkans and north of the Danube changed the rules of the game.<sup>66</sup> With Ottoman support—including that of local warlords such as the Mihaloğlu family<sup>67</sup>—the patriarchate of Constantinople strengthened its grip over the region.

This grip, it seems, was stronger in Wallachia. In 1534, Antonios Karmalikes, a patriarchal representative, compelled the Wallachian Church and Prince Vlad Vintilă (r. 1532–35) to accept the patriarchate's requests.<sup>68</sup> Ten years later, in the context of a quarrel between Constantinople and

Ohrid, Sultan Suleyman reinforced the patriarchate's jurisdiction over the Wallachian and Moldavian Churches.<sup>69</sup>

Mount Athos had adapted to the new realities before 1453.<sup>70</sup> The emperor was discarded, and the sultan took over, many of his Christian subjects recognizing him as a legitimate ruler.<sup>71</sup> The patriarchate experienced a profound reorganization as an Ottoman institution—a long and difficult process—and started to profit from the Ottoman advance.<sup>72</sup> An increasingly strong migration flux from southeast Europe to the Romanian principalities also benefited from the *pax Ottomanica*, while strengthening the power and influence of transregional networks centered on the “Great Church.”<sup>73</sup> The Greek Orthodox elites underwent a “reconstruction” with a spectacular long-term outcome.<sup>74</sup>

## Conclusion

How does Iorga's *Byzantium after Byzantium* fare in this extremely dynamic historiographical setting, which seems more sensitive to adaptation to the new Ottoman realities than to survival?<sup>75</sup> At first sight, his paradigm, which was off to a slow start, has lost significant ground. Scholarship focused increasingly on the numerous post-1453 “inventions” of Byzantine tradition.<sup>76</sup> The transformations and instrumentalizations of the “Byzantine idea” in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries attracted significant attention.<sup>77</sup> Historians have quite compellingly advocated for a “weak” but effective concept—“Ottoman Europe.”<sup>78</sup> Art historians have also meaningfully reflected on the topic.<sup>79</sup> (Neither Iorga, nor Obolensky tackled the art, architecture, and visual culture of the Balkans and the Carpathians in detail.)<sup>80</sup> Several works and projects provide important insights into the history of the post-1453 patriarchate of Constantinople, the Romanian princes’ patronage of the holy places, and the “Phanariots.”<sup>81</sup> Still, although an alternative groundbreaking paradigm may very well be coined, it seems unlikely that it will discard entirely Iorga's paradigm.

On the one hand, several observations made by Iorga remain valid, such as the fact that there was no one Byzantium but variations of an “idea” or the distinction between a direct, contemporary type of Byzantine “heritage,”

like that of the Bulgarians and Serbians, and an indirect, imagined one, like that of the Romanians. As our case study shows, before the fall of the empire, neither Wallachia nor Moldavia raised imperial or successor claims—the Byzantine tradition was invented later (and these later inventions deserve further investigation). On the other hand, several lines of investigation identified by Iorga have not been properly followed, despite their huge potential. Recent studies on both the Eastern patriarchates and the Christian elites in the Ottoman Empire prove just how productive such inquiries are. Despite its many flaws, *Byzance après Byzance* remains, as Vitalien Laurent has justly noted, “seductive.”<sup>82</sup>

## Notes

1. [Research for this essay was supported by the European Research Council \(ERC\) Starting Grant under the European Union Horizon 2020 research and innovation program \(ORTHPOL—grant agreement no. 950287\).](#)
2. [N. Iorga, \*Byzance après Byzance: Considérations générales pour le Congrès d'Études Byzantines de Sofia\* \(Bucharest, 1934\).](#)
3. [N. Iorga, \*Byzance après Byzance: Continuation de l'histoire de la vie byzantine\* \(Bucharest: Institut d'études byzantines, 1935\). The 1934 “general considerations” are at 5–13.](#)
4. [See reviews by Raymond Janin in \*Échos d'Orient\* 34, no. 180 \(1935\): 502–3; and by Georg Stadtmüller in \*Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas\* 1, no. 1 \(1936\): 159–60.](#)
5. [Vitalien Laurent, “Nicola Iorga – Historien de la vie byzantine,” \*Revue des études byzantines\* 4, no. 4 \(1946\): 5–23.](#)
6. [Diana Mishkova, “The Afterlife of a Commonwealth: Narratives of Byzantium in the National Historiographies of Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia and Romania,” in \*Entangled Histories of the Balkans, vol. 3, Shared Pasts, Disputed Legacies\*, eds. Roumen Daskalov and Alexander Vezenkov \(Leiden: Brill, 2015\), 118–273, at 266n376.](#)
7. [Olga Cicanci, “Conceptia lui Nicolae Iorga despre ‘Byzance après Byzance’” \[N. Iorga's conception of ‘Byzance après Byzance’\], in](#)

- Nicolae Iorga – istoric al Bizanțului. Culegere de studii*, edited by Eugen Stănescu (Bucharest: EARSR, 1971), pp. 201–34.
8. Denys Zakythinos, “Nicolas Iorga, historien de Byzance après Byzance,” *Bulletin de l’Association internationale des Études Sud-Est européennes* 9 (1971): 5–11.
  9. N. Iorga, *Byzance après Byzance: Continuation de l’Histoire de la vie byzantine*, foreword by Mihai Berza, afterword by Virgil Câdea (Bucharest: Association Internationale d’Études du Sud-Est Européen —Comité National Roumain, 1971); *Bizanț după Bizanț*, trans. Liliana Iorga-Pippidi, afterword Virgil Câdea (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică Română, 1972).
  10. For the context, see Diana Mishkova, *Rival Byzantiums: Empire and Identity in Southeastern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 264–85.
  11. Only two others were published: Valentin Al. Georgescu, *Bizanțul și instituțiile românești până la mijlocul secolului al XVIII-lea* [Byzantium and the Romanian institutions until mid-eighteenth century] (Bucharest: EARSR, 1980); Ion Radu Mircea, *Répertoire des manuscrits slaves en Roumanie: Auteurs byzantines et slaves*, eds. Pavlina Bojčeva and Svetlana Todorova (Sofia: Institut d’études balkaniques, 2005). The monographs by Eugen Stănescu on the political relations and Maria-Ana Musicescu on the artistic ones did not materialize.
  12. Andrei Pippidi, *Tradiția politică bizantină în Țările Române în secolele XVI–XVIII* [The political Byzantine tradition in the Romanian lands from the 16th to the 18th centuries] (Bucharest: EARSR, 1983; 2nd ed., Bucharest: Corint, 2001); Andrei Pippidi, “Entre héritage et imitation: la tradition byzantine dans les Pays roumains. Nouvelles réflexions, vingt ans après,” in *Relations gréco-roumaines: Interculturalité et identité nationale*, eds. Paschalis M. Kitromilides and Anna Tabaki (Athens: Institut de Recherches Néohelléniques, 2004), 23–37.
  13. Dumitru Nastase, “L’idée impériale dans les Pays roumains et le ‘crypto-empire chrétien’ sous la domination ottomane. État et importance du problème,” *Σύμμεικτα* 4 (1981): 201–50; Dumitru Nastase, “Imperial Claims in the Romanian Principalities from the

- Fourteenth to the Seventeenth Centuries: New Contributions,” in *The Byzantine Legacy in Eastern Europe*, ed. Lowell M. Clucas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 185–224.
14. Daniel Barbu, *Bizanț contra Bizanț: Explorări în cultura politică românească* [Byzantium against Byzantium: Explorations in Romanian political culture] (Bucharest: Nemira, 2001).
  15. *Bizanț versus Bizanț: Introducere la o dezbatere privind devenirea românească* [Byzantium versus Byzantium: Introduction to a debate on Romanian becoming] (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 2010).
  16. N. Iorga, *Byzance après Byzance: Continuation de l’Histoire de la vie byzantine*, foreword Alexandre Paléologue (Paris: Balland, 1992); N. Iorga, *To Βυζάντιο μετά το Βυζάντιο*, trans. Giannis Karas, foreword Nikos G. Svoronos (Athens: Gutenberg, 1989); N. Iorga, *Byzantium after Byzantium*, introduction by Virgil Câdea, trans. Laura Treptow (Iași: Center for Romanian Studies in cooperation with the Romanian Institute of International Studies, 2000).
  17. Diana Mishkova, *Beyond Balkanism: The Scholarly Politics of Region Making* (London: Routledge, 2019). For a thorough and insightful comparative analysis of the ideological uses of Byzantine history by representatives of Balkan national historiographies (Greek, Bulgarian, Albanian, Romanian, and Turkish), as well as by proponents of “Russian imperial nationalism,” see Dimitris Stamatopoulos, *To Βυζάντιο μετά το έθνος: Το πρόβλημα της συνέχειας στις βαλκανικές ιστοριογραφίες* (Athens: Alexandria, 2009) [English trans.: *Byzantium after the Nation: The Problem of Continuity in Balkan Historiographies* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2021)].
  18. For the later periods, see Michał Wasiucionek's “Greek as Ottoman? Language, Identity and Mediation of Ottoman Culture in the Early Modern Period,” *Cromohs* 21 (2017–18): 70–89, <https://oajournals.fupress.net/index.php/cromohs/article/view/6942/6940>.
  19. N. Iorga, *Histoire de la vie byzantine: Empire et civilisation, d’après les sources—illustrée par les monnaies*, vol. 1, *L’Empire œcuménique (527–641)*; vol. 2, *L’Empire moyen de civilisation hellénique (641–1081)*; vol. 3, *L’Empire de pénétration latine (1081–1453)* (Bucharest: Édition de l’auteur, 1934).

20. [N. Iorga, \*The Byzantine Empire\*, trans. Allen H. Powles \(London: J. M. Dent, 1907\).](#)
21. [N. Iorga, “Byzance en Occident,” in \*Deux conférences sur la vie byzantine données en Hollande\* \(Paris: École roumaine en France—Fontenay-aux-Roses, 1936\), 15–25, at 25 \(“Il faut rétablir dans ses droits une des plus grandes civilisations du monde, et dans toute son étendue”\). This paper, presented at the Institute of Art History in Utrecht, was also published in Iorga's \*Études byzantines\* \(Bucharest: Institut d'études byzantines, 1935\), 1: 317–36.](#)
22. [Iorga, \*Byzantine Empire\*, v; Iorga, \*Histoire de la vie byzantine\*, 1:1.](#)
23. [Raymond Janin, review of N. Iorga, \*Histoire de la vie byzantine\*, \*Échos d'Orient\* 33, no. 174 \(1934\): 252–3.](#)
24. [Iorga, \*Histoire de la vie byzantine\*, 3: 296 \(“Mais, si on peut détruire les intérêts, les idées survivent à tous les désastres”\).](#)
25. [For a useful presentation of the paradigm, with up-to-date bibliography, see Hans-Christian Maner, “Byzance après Byzance—Nicolae Iorga's Concept and Its Aftermath,” in \*Imagining Byzantium: Perceptions, Patterns, Problems\*, eds. Alena Alshanskaya, Andreas Gietzen, and Christina Hadjiafxenti \(Heidelberg: Propylaeum, 2020\), 31–38.](#)
26. [Iorga, \*Byzantium after Byzantium\* \(2000\), 25.](#)
27. [Dan Ioan Mureșan, “Revisiter la Grande Église: Gédéon, Iorga et Runciman sur le rôle du patriarcat œcuménique à l'époque ottomane,” in \*Héritages de Byzance en Europe du Sud-Est à l'époque moderne et contemporaine\*, eds. Olivier Delouis, Anne Couderc, and Petre Guran \(Athens: École française d'Athènes, 2013\), 45–61.](#)
28. [For the Phanariots, see Andrei Pippidi, “Phanar, Phanariotes, phanariotisme” \(1975\), in \*Hommes et idées du Sud-Est européen à l'aube de l'âge moderne\* \(Paris: Éditions du CNRS—Editura Academiei, 1980\), 339–50; Radu G. Păun, “Some Observations on the Historical Origins of the ‘Phanariot Phenomenon’ in Moldavia and Wallachia,” in \*Greeks in Romania in the Nineteenth Century\*, eds. Gelina Harlaftis and Radu G. Păun \(Athens: Alpha Bank, 2013\), 43–90; Christine M. Philliou, \*Biography of an Empire: Governing Ottomans in an Age of Revolution\* \(Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011\); Marinos Sariyannis, “Οι Φαναριώτες και η](#)



- οθωμανική παράδοση: Επιδράσεις και στεγανά, 17ος–18ος αιώνες [Phanariots and Ottoman tradition: Influences and barriers, 17th and 18th centuries], in Τουρκολογικά: Τιμητικός τόμος για τον Αναστάσιο Κ. Ιορδάνογλου, ed. Yiorgos Salakidis (Thessaloniki: Antonios Stamoulis, 2011), 305–22.
29. Andrei Pippidi, “Byzance des Phanariotes,” in Delouis, Couderc, and Guran, *Héritages de Byzance*, 117–29. For a different take on the topic, see Cyril Mango, “The Phanariots and the Byzantine Tradition” (1973), in Mango, *Byzantium and Its Image: History and Culture of the Byzantine Empire and Its Heritage* (London: Variorum, 1998), 41–66 (no. XVIII).
30. According to Dennis J. Deletant, although the Phanariot princes “left the stage of the principalities” in 1821, “the Byzantine tradition lived on” (“Some Aspects of the Byzantine Tradition in the Rumanian Principalities,” *Slavonic and East European Review* 59, no. 1 (1981): 1–14.
31. Iorga, *Byzantium after Byzantium* (2000), 30, 231–34, respectively.
32. N. Iorga, “Y-a-t-il eu un moyen-âge Byzantin?,” *Académie Roumaine: Bulletin de la Section historique* 13 (1927): 4. This paper, which was presented at the Second International Congress of Byzantine Studies (Belgrade, 1927), was re-edited in Iorga's *Études byzantines*, 1: 299–311.
33. Dimitri Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth: Eastern Europe, 500–1453* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), 207–8.
34. “These rulers [i.e., of Wallachia and Moldavia] of a patriarchal peasant's order, these army commanders influenced by the knightly Hungary of the Angevins, became—under the influence of the Byzantine Greeks, involved in their lives through commerce, marriage or their common living in Constantinople, in the district of Pera and Galata, with the pleasant social relations of the Catholic Levantines of Italian language and of Western habits, but especially on the islands and other places of refuge and exile, through the establishment of the great families in those lands where they were not constantly under the greedy and angry eyes of the Turks – the true successors of the Byzantine emperors.” Iorga, *Byzantium after Byzantium* (2000), 28. As shown by Georgescu, it is difficult to label the history of the Romanian

- principalities until 1453 as a “Byzantine period” (*Bizanțul și instituțiile românești*, 21).
35. Nicolae Șerban Tanașoca, “Bizanțul, Europa și românii” [Byzantium, Europe, and the Romanians], in *Bizanțul și Românii* (Bucharest: Fundația Pro, 2003), 17–18.
  36. Adrian Ioniță, Beatrice Kelemen, and Alexandru Simon, *Al Wa: Prințul Negru al Vlahiei și vremurile sale* [Al Wa: The Black Prince of Wallachia and his times] (Cluj- Napoca: Argonaut, 2017), 260–2 (esp. 260n9).
  37. *Fontes Historiae Daco-Romanae*, vol. 4, *Scriptores et Acta Imperii Byzantini Saeculorum IV–XV* (Bucharest: EARSR, 1982), 197–203.
  38. For Hyakinthos, see Lidia Cotovanu, “‘Alexis de Kiev et de toute la Russie’—‘Hyacinthe de toute la Hongrovalachie.’ deux cas parallèles? Quelques précisions autour des relations ecclésiastiques des Russes et des Roumains avec Byzance crépusculaire (XIV<sup>e</sup> s.),” in *Închinare lui Petre Ș. Năsturel la 80 de ani*, eds. Ionel Cândeș, Paul Cernovodeanu, and Gheorghe Lazăr (Brăila: Istros, 2003), 531–54.
  39. Șerban Papacostea, “‘Prima unire românească’: Voievodatul de Argeș și Țara Severin” [“The first Romanian union”: The voivodate of Argeș and Țara Severin], *Studii și materiale de istorie medie* 28 (2010): 9–24.
  40. Șerban Papacostea, “Orientări și reorientări în politica externă românească: anul 1359” [A turning point of Wallachia's foreign policy: The year 1359], *Studii și materiale de istorie medie* 27 (2009): 9–24.
  41. Petre Ș. Năsturel, “Autour de la partition de la Métropole de Hongrovalachie (1370)” (1977–78), in *Études d'histoire byzantine et post-bizantines*, eds. Emanuel Constantin Antoche, Lidia Cotovanu, and Ionuț Tudorie (Brăila: Istros, 2019), 357–77.
  42. *Fontes Historiae Daco-Romanae*, 204–5. For a thorough analysis, see Lidia Cotovanu, “Deux cas parallèles d'oikonomia byzantine appliquée aux métropolitains Anthime Kritopoulos de Séverin et Cyprien de Kiev, de Petite-Russie et des Lituaniens (deuxième moitié du XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle),” *Revue Roumaine d'histoire*, Part I, 52 (2003): 19–60; Part II, 53 (2004): 11–54.

43. [The classic reference is Petre Ș. Năsturel, \*Le Mont Athos et les Roumains: Recherches sur leurs relations du milieu du XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle à 1654\* \(Rome: PIO, 1986\).](#)
44. [For Chariton's three testaments, see \*Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents: A Complete Translation of the Surviving Founders' Typika and Testaments\*, eds. John Thomas and Angela Constantinides Hero with the assistance of Giles Constable \(Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2000\), 4:1408–32 \(trans. George Dennis\). For Chariton, see Lidia Cotovanu, “Caritone di Koutloumousiou e la presenza romana sul Monte Athos nel XIV secolo,” in \*Atanasio e il monachesimo al Monte Athos: Atti del XII Convegno ecumenico internazionale di spiritualità ortodossa \(sezione bizantina\), Bose, 12–14 settembre 2004\*, eds. Sabino Chialà and Lisa Cremaschi \(Magnano: Qiqajon, 2005\), 153–80.](#)
45. [\*Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents\*, 1409–10 \(comments of George Dennis\).](#)
46. [Matthew was accused of a canonical infringement: Vitalien Laurent, “Le trisépiscopat du patriarche Matthieu I<sup>er</sup> \(1397–1410\): Un grand procès canonique à Byzance au début du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle,” \*Revue des études byzantines\* 30, no. 1 \(1972\): 5–166.](#)
47. [Șerban Papacostea “La Valachie et la crise de structure de l’Empire Ottoman,” \*Revue Roumaine d’histoire\* 25, nos. 1–2 \(1986\): 23–33. For the wider context—the Ottoman crisis after the battle of Ankara \(1402\)—see Dimitris Kastritsis, \*The Sons of Bayezid: Empire Building and Representation of Ottoman Civil War of 1402–1413\* \(Leiden: Brill, 2007\); Nevra Necipoğlu, \*Byzantium between the Ottomans and the Latins: Politics and Society in the Late Empire\* \(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009\), 184–234.](#)
48. [For the fourteenth-century expansion project, see Lidia Cotovanu, “Church without Borders: A Successful Project of the Hesychast Patriarchs of the 14th Century,” \*Bulletin de correspondance hellénique moderne et contemporain\* 2 \(2020\), <http://journals.openedition.org/bchmc/387>.](#)
49. [Giacomo di Pietro Luccari, \*Copioso ristreto degli Annali di Rausa \[sic\] libri quatro\* \(Venice: Antonio Leonardi, 1605\), 105.](#)

50. [Alexandru Elian, “Les rapports byzantino-roumains,” \*Byzantinoslavica\* 19, no. 2 \(1958\): 213–25, at 217.](#)
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# **Part I Art Historical Overviews**

## 2 The Afterlives of Byzantine Art in the Wider Adriatic

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In seeking to unravel the complexities and nuances of the early modern Adriatic Sea, Fernand Braudel highlighted the region's receptivity to Eastern cultural influences and was among the first to hint at an Adriatic “afterlife” of Byzantium: “Here [in the Adriatic] eastern influence could already be felt, and Byzantium lived on.”<sup>1</sup> Since Braudel's time, the study of the Adriatic has become inseparable from the study of Byzantium, and an ever-growing body of research has brought to light different aspects of the Byzantine impact on the political, intellectual, and cultural history of the Adriatic societies.<sup>2</sup> Unsurprisingly, most studies are narrowly focused on specific geographical areas and chronologically limited in a timeframe spanning from the sixth up to the twelfth centuries, during which time several Adriatic provinces developed under direct Byzantine rule.<sup>3</sup> Subsequently, for the period after the thirteenth century, the scholarly discourse is overwhelmingly dominated by discussions on the relations between Byzantium and Venice, rarely extending beyond the year 1453.<sup>4</sup> Yet, the question remains: is it possible to claim, as Braudel implied, that “Byzantium lived on” in the Adriatic after the official dissolution of the Eastern Roman Empire?

Thus far scholarship has focused on tracing the legacy of Byzantine art in regions that retained an ethnic, linguistic, or religious affinity with Byzantium, such as Venetian Crete, the Balkan Peninsula, or Russia.<sup>5</sup> Western European links have also enjoyed a good deal of scholarly attention, with an increased focus on the Byzantine contribution to the European intellectual movement of humanism. As a geographical and cultural space, the early modern Adriatic has occupied but a marginal place in so-called post-Byzantine studies and, with the glaring exception of

Venice, remains largely excluded from dominant discourses on the intellectual and cultural heritage of the Eastern Roman Empire.

Yet, as this chapter aims to demonstrate, the Adriatic was arguably the westernmost region where the Byzantine cultural heritage survived to a substantial extent and for a period of time that extended well beyond the fall of the Eastern Roman Empire, spanning the entire early modern period. Without claiming to be exhaustive, this chapter briefly reviews the factors that rendered the Adriatic receptive to Byzantine art and analyzes the evolution of Byzantine pictorial forms in the region during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The focus of this study on this specific period is not only determined by efforts to keep the study in length, but also because these centuries witnessed a series of political, religious, and sociocultural fermentations that defined the future reception of Byzantinizing art forms in the region. Marked by the mass exodus of Greek and other Orthodox Christians to Western Europe, these determining centuries saw an unprecedented interaction between the Catholic and Orthodox elements of the Adriatic, which, according to Braudel, “combined to give this frontier zone its own originality.”<sup>6</sup> Building on these cross-confessional and intracommunal dialogues, this chapter will trace the afterlives of the Byzantine artistic heritage in the Adriatic along two main strands: one oriented toward Westernization and the other toward the preservation of the Byzantine tradition.

The former trend is discussed through the use of working terms such as “eclecticism,” “hybridity/hybridization,” and even “modernization.”<sup>7</sup> These terms are not used here interchangeably for the sake of linguistic diversity but rather because they underscore the levels of embeddedness of Western pictorial elements in icon painting, ranging from the selective adoption and implementation of Western motifs into traditional Byzantine templates to their creative fusion and synthesis into entirely new iconographic or stylistic solutions. As we shall see, these practices were often considered as a means to innovate and modernize icon painting, a medium that was otherwise based on the reproduction of older iconographic models. The term “post-Byzantine,” on the other hand, is generally avoided in this chapter and is only employed as a heuristic term, to define icon production from the mid-fifteenth century onward. In a similar vein, the concepts of

Byzantinism or Adrio-Byzantinism, critically reviewed in the next section, indicate through their wide use in literature the manifestation of Byzantine elements in the cultural and artistic production of the Adriatic basin.<sup>8</sup>

## Adriatic Byzantinisms

As noted earlier, the Byzantine presence in the Adriatic can be dated back as early as the sixth century and technically lasted up to the 1200s. Even though the empire had virtually lost its political grip over the largest part of its Adriatic provinces by the eighth century, Italian and Dalmatian city-states would continue to gravitate to the cultural orbit of Byzantium throughout the entire Middle Ages. As ideological heir to the Roman Empire, Byzantium would remain the dominant intellectual and cultural model for Adriatic societies until its ultimate replacement by Venice, exerting a unifying effect on the culturally diverse and politically fragmented landscape of the region.

Scholars were quick to detect the visual evidence of this pervasive Byzantine impact on the art and material culture of the medieval Adriatic, as is reflected in the terminology that is still employed to label the artistic production of the region from late antiquity until the fourteenth century. Particularly telling is the continued use in Italian and Croatian scholarship of the conventional and highly contested term “Adrio-Byzantinism” (*adriobizantinismo*, *adriobizantinizam*).<sup>9</sup> Coined first in 1933 by the Danish architectural historian Ejnar Dyggve to describe the presence of Byzantine elements in late antique and early medieval Dalmatian sculpture and architecture, the concept was later decontextualized and has now become an umbrella term, encompassing an array of Byzantine influences discernible in the icon and fresco painting of the South Adriatic from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries.<sup>10</sup> Regardless of its relevance and historical validity, the wide usage of the term “Adrio-Byzantinism” strongly reflects the enduring imprint of Byzantine art on the material culture of the medieval Adriatic, as well as the dissemination of a uniform pictorial language along both shores.

From the eleventh up until roughly the fourteenth centuries, a multitude of religious monuments along both Adriatic coasts were decorated in a style that was more or less Byzantine. Some of the earliest examples include a series of fresco cycles from the region of Ragusa, such as the fragmentary wall paintings of Dubrovnik Cathedral (eleventh century) or those in the churches of St. John in Šipan and St. Nicholas in Koločep (both mid-twelfth century), all of which have parallels on the Italian coast, mainly in the frescoed cave churches of Apulia and Calabria that served as traditional hubs of Byzantine monasticism. From the fourteenth century onward, the vibrant commercial exchanges with the Orthodox Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean resulted in a further inflow of Byzantine artworks as well as craftspeople in the region. Indeed, from that time on, Italian and Dalmatian sources abound with references to artists and artisans of Greek origin or Byzantine formation who were active in the region, such as the “Greek painters” (*pictoribus graecis*) who in 1331 painted the cathedral of St. Tryphon in Kotor.<sup>11</sup>

Harder to assess is the circulation of Byzantine icons in the Adriatic, at least for the period preceding the thirteenth century. As Pina Belli D’Elia famously claims in writing about medieval Apulia, before the year 1200, there was virtually no evidence of icon veneration in the region, a notion recently contested by Magdalena Skoblar, who argues for the presence of icons in media other than painted panel in both Adriatic coasts during the high Middle Ages.<sup>12</sup> Regardless, painted icons began gaining wider popularity in the Adriatic only after the thirteenth century due to a multitude of reasons, often associated with the intensification of trade and pilgrimage between the Crusader States of the Levant, the islands of the Eastern Mediterranean, and the South Adriatic.<sup>13</sup> These contacts reached their peak in the wake of the Fourth Crusade, which opened up new channels for the transfer of Byzantine artifacts and trends to the West.

The Fourth Crusade naturally brings into the picture the Republic of Venice, which can hardly be absent from a discussion on the Adriatic's “Byzantinism.” In Venice, the adoption of Byzantine artistic styles and techniques goes back as early as the eleventh century, as witnessed in the mosaic complexes of the Venetian lagoon and mainly in the basilica of St. Mark, the quintessential product of the fusion of Byzantine and Venetian

traditions. After the Fourth Crusade, Venetian emulation of Byzantine artistic forms escalated to a full-scale appropriation of the Byzantine cultural heritage.<sup>14</sup> The systematic looting of Byzantine artifacts and their incorporation in the Venetian civic fabric, as well as the republic's rule over “a quarter and a half quarter of all of Romania” not only shaped the future development of the Venetian cultural identity but also defined the entire outlook of the Adriatic societies on Byzantine art and notably on icon veneration.<sup>15</sup> This Venetian brand of “Byzantinism” would survive up to the sixteenth century, by which time Venice had become nothing less than “another Byzantium,” as Cardinal Bessarion (1403–72) famously remarked. Inspired by Byzantine esthetics, Venetian Renaissance masters produced works that evoked the Greco-Byzantine tradition of the city by emulating the city's golden mosaic interiors, using Greek inscriptions, or even directly replicating Byzantine iconographic types (which Giovanni Bellini did when he fashioned his popular half-length Madonnas after Byzantine icons of the Hodegetria).<sup>16</sup>

A new chapter in the history of Adriatic-Byzantine relations opened with the dawn of the early modern period. A first decisive milestone was the Council of Ferrara-Florence (1438–9) for the Union of the Orthodox and Catholic Churches, which allowed for direct contact between the Italian elites and the Byzantine world, this time on Italian ground.<sup>17</sup> The vibrant presence of the populous Greek delegation in major Italian cities, from Venice to Medici Florence, renewed the interest of the Westerners in the Greco-Byzantine cultural heritage and led the way for the migration of Greek scholars to Renaissance Italian centers. After the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453, these originally isolated migrations escalated into a mass exodus of Greek populations that was accompanied by an influx of Eastern artworks in Western collections. Together with manuscripts, relics, and other luxury items, Byzantine migrants carried with them valuable icons, which they would offer as diplomatic gifts to Italian princes and ecclesiastical prelates in exchange for political support and financial privileges.<sup>18</sup> One of the leading figures of the Greek expatriate intelligentsia, Cardinal Bessarion (1403–72), is known for having imported a significant number of Eastern artifacts to the West, including his famous reliquary (*Staurotheke*), which he bequeathed to the Scuola Grande della

Carità in Venice, as well as seven mosaic icons that he donated to St. Peter's in Rome.<sup>19</sup> Popes and cardinals ranked among the most ardent collectors of Byzantine artworks. For example, the Venetian cardinal Pietro Barbo, future Pope Paul II (1417–71), boasted of a large collection of painted and sculpted icons, including twenty-three icons “de musayco parvissimo.”<sup>20</sup> At Barbo's death in 1471, a part of his icon collection was passed down to Cardinal Francesco d’Este, while the largest one was acquired by Lorenzo de’ Medici (1449–92), who continued his family's tradition of collecting works “alla greca.”

## A Western Afterlife: Icons for Catholic Audiences

Fifteenth-century fascination with Byzantine art and culture would set the stage for the future reception of icon painting in the broad Adriatic region. Following the Ottoman conquests in the Eastern Mediterranean and the subsequent migration waves, Eastern Christian artifacts and notably icons continued to reach Venice and other Adriatic centers during the entire early modern period. However, contrary to the previous decades, from the turn of the sixteenth century onward, they no longer constituted luxury items that were accessible only to affluent elites but instead became gradually more affordable to a broader clientele of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. This unprecedented popularization of icons can be understood not only in proportion to the emergence of new markets in the Adriatic but also to the flourishing of the iconographic centers of the Eastern Mediterranean, primarily of Candia, the capital of Venetian Crete.

With approximately 180 icon painters active in the period between 1450 and 1600, the workshops of Candia were occupied with the mass production of icons in a variety of formats, sizes, prices, and more importantly styles.<sup>21</sup> Trained in the multiethnic and multiconfessional society of Venetian-ruled Candia, Cretan painters had been long familiarized with Western artistic trends, and apart from their ability to paint in the Byzantine tradition (*alla greca*), they had developed hybrid pictorial solutions that adopted the visual language of Italian painting (*alla latina*). Without breaking from the conventions of the Orthodox pictorial

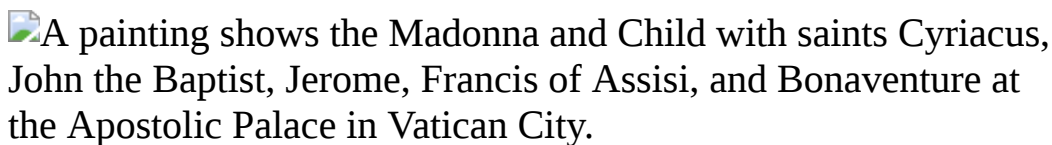


tradition, icons made in the Italian manner displayed various degrees of Western influence, ranging from the use of Latin inscriptions to the eclectic integration of late Gothic and Renaissance iconographic motifs, a softer modeling of the facial features and drapery, as well as the replacement of the typical golden background of Byzantine icons with more naturalistic landscapes. It is worth mentioning that similar processes of hybridization were taking place in other Mediterranean islands that were under Latin rule, such as Rhodes and Cyprus.<sup>22</sup>

The stylistic bilingualism of Greek and especially Cretan painters rendered them responsive to the new market opportunities that were emerging in the Adriatic and, at the same time, made their works appealing to the esthetic tastes of audiences that were receptive to Byzantine visual culture but still predominantly Catholic, which the Adriatic societies were. As icon trade continued to expand, icon painters started to increasingly travel or permanently move to Adriatic centers.<sup>23</sup> In order to remain competitive and meet the demands of their ever-growing Catholic clientele, Greek artists were prompted to further Westernize or “modernize” their works and stay current with the latest esthetic trends. For instance, when in 1475 a certain “Magister Nicolaus pictor de Graecia” was commissioned to paint an icon for the main altar of the church of Santa Maria di Varano, his patrons made sure to remind him that he needed to portray at least the principal figures “in the modern style” (*moderno more*).<sup>24</sup> Although the qualifier “moderno more” cannot be fully assessed since the work in question eludes scholarship, it may be interpreted as a cue to the Byzantine-trained painter to bring his composition up to date with the inclusion of early Renaissance motifs that had become fashionable in the fifteenth-century Italian Marche.

Although it is not always possible to determine the extent to which processes of hybridization occurred due to the involvement and intervention of patronage or to the artists’ own creative agency, by the early sixteenth century, Western pictorial forms were conspicuously permeating icon production, notably in works that were made locally and intended for Catholic religious spaces. An illustrative example of this hybridization is a large icon of the Madonna and Child with SS Cyriacus, John the Baptist, Jerome, Francis of Assisi, and Bonaventure, originally at the church of San Francesco delle Scale in Ancona and now part of the Vatican collections

([Figure 2.1](#)). As was discovered in 2021, the icon was commissioned in 1508 by the Cretan Angelos Bitzamanos, who was then living in Ancona, and it was intended as an altarpiece for the funerary chapel of the local nobleman Francesco Scottivoli.<sup>25</sup> Made by a Greek painter for an Italian patron and intended for a Catholic religious space, the icon exhibits an eclectic blend of Byzantine and Italian components. The overall composition follows the popular format of a *sacra conversazione* and features inscriptions in both Greek and Latin. Furthermore, the holy figures are rendered in a stylized manner, typical of Cretan art, although they are heavily based on Western iconographic models, handpicked from a variety of sources, such as late Gothic and early Renaissance Italian templates, as well as Western European prints. The Virgin, on the other hand, is depicted in the Italianate type of the Madre della Consolazione that had become widely popular among Western markets. A similar amalgamation is displayed even in details: the realistically drawn cross of St. Cyriacus attempts to break the flattened two-dimensionality of the composition, whereas the delicate modeling of the saints' garments and their elaborate decorative patterns come in direct contrast with the geometric linearity of the robes of Christ and the Baptist.

A painting shows the Madonna and Child with saints Cyriacus, John the Baptist, Jerome, Francis of Assisi, and Bonaventure at the Apostolic Palace in Vatican City.

[Figure 2.1 Angelos Bitzamanos, Madonna and Child with SS Cyriacus, John the Baptist, Jerome, Francis of Assisi, and Bonaventure, mixed medium, 1508, Apostolic Palace, Vatican City \(provenance: San Francesco delle Scale, Ancona\).](#)

Source: Musei Vaticani.

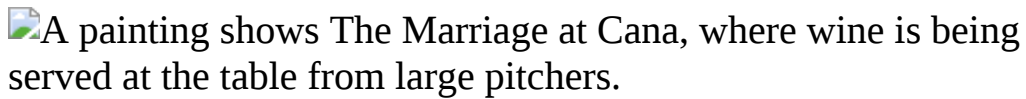
Angelos Bitzamanos's skill and flexibility earned him enough popularity that the painter appears to have made a living solely from working for an exclusively Catholic clientele in several centers of the South Adriatic. Ten years after his work in Ancona, we find Angelos on the East Adriatic coast, working on another altarpiece, this time for the confraternity church of the Holy Spirit in the village of Komolac, near Ragusa.<sup>26</sup> In this mature work,

the painter further developed the ideas he introduced in the Scottivoli altarpiece and even set several of the scenes of his composition against a naturalistic background, a Venetian trend that was becoming increasingly popular among icon painters. Later on, Angelos's tradition was followed by his younger relative and workshop assistant, Donatos, who in 1539 signed a "hybrid" altarpiece depicting the Madonna di Costantinopoli with SS Francis and Catherine for the parish church of Noicàttaro, now at the Pinacoteca Provinciale di Bari.

The integration of Western themes and models in icon painting reached its peak in the work of artists that were active in Venice, as the city was rapidly developing into the hub of a thriving Greek community. Arguably the most idiosyncratic painter of the first half of the century was Ioannes Permeniates, whose background in Rhodian hybrid painting allowed him to skillfully appropriate elements from early-sixteenth-century Venetian art. Omnipresent in his icons is his trademark naturalistic background landscape, inspired by Bellini and his circle, which features rich vegetation, lakes and rivers, fortified cities on hilltops, riders, merchants in Mamluk attire, exotic animals, and various pastoral and Eastern motifs. Much like Angelos, Permeniates also worked for a predominantly Catholic patronage and even received public commissions, such as his famous *sacra conversazione* for the Scuola dei Bottai, now at the Museo Correr.

The last quarter of the sixteenth century marked a discernible shift in the style, iconography, and subject matter of the Latin-oriented icons that were circulating in the Adriatic. Late Gothic, and early Renaissance elements were gradually being replaced by more fashionable mannerist motifs, while new iconographic themes, such as biblical genre scenes, were now introduced to echo the current trends in Venetian art. As the goal was to render accessible to the masses popular works of Venetian masters, like Tintoretto, Veronese, and the Bassano family, quantity was often preferred to quality, earning these painters the quasi-derogatory sobriquet *madonneri*, by which they are still referred to in literature.<sup>27</sup> Behind the conventional names that they have often been assigned, however, these *madonneri* were none other than some of the most skilled icon painters of the time. A closer inspection of several *madonneri* panels reveals the mannerisms of renowned artists, such as Michael Damaskenos and Thomas Bathas, both

master painters of the Greek confraternity of Venice ([Figure 2.2](#)). It seems that for some of these expatriate artists, the mass manufacture of such devotional panels was a significant source of profit and almost as important as their default icon production. To give an example, Bathas, whose hand can be identified in panels attributed to the so-called Maestro della L, revealed his involvement with Western art in his 1599 will and wanted to make sure that upon his death “all of his designs, both those in the Greek and those in the Italian style” would be passed on to his pupil and assistant, Emmanouel Tzanfournares.<sup>28</sup>

A painting shows The Marriage at Cana, where wine is being served at the table from large pitchers.

[Figure 2.2 Michael Damaskenos \(after Tintoretto\), \*The Wedding at Cana\*, oil on panel, ca. 1574–83, Museo Correr, Venice.](#)

*Source:* Public domain.

## **A Diasporic Afterlife: The “Devout Greek Manner” of the Orthodox Communities**


Despite his prolific work in the Venetian mannerist style, Bathas is mostly known today for his stylistic “Orthodoxy.” In fact, it was his adherence to the “devout Greek manner” that in 1598 won him the commission for the apse mosaic for the Greek church of St. George in Venice against a group of artists that included the Venetian Jacopo Palma il Giovane.<sup>29</sup> What might seem like an extraordinary occurrence—especially in view of the Westernizing tendency in post-Byzantine art that was discussed in the previous section—in fact simply highlights the esthetic priorities of the Greek Orthodox Church and perfectly encapsulates the dynamics that would eventually transform the early modern Adriatic into a stronghold of Byzantinism. While the intrinsic openness of the Italian and Dalmatian societies to Byzantine artistic forms managed to sustain a thriving market for Westernized icons, an Adriatic brand of pictorial Orthodoxy was promoted among the Greek Orthodox communities that were rapidly emerging in the region.

The early modern period marked a dramatic shift in the ethnoconfessional and cultural demographics of the extended Adriatic, as mass waves of Greek-speaking or Eastern Christian migrants swept through the region in the aftermath of the Ottoman conquests in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Balkans. Alongside the leading commerce-oriented Greek communities of Ancona and Venice, throughout the sixteenth century, a series of Greek diasporic settlements were founded along both Adriatic coasts, predominantly in territories of the Republic of Venice and the Kingdom of Naples, which were particularly welcoming to Christian refugees. Until the mid-seventeenth century, these diasporic communities would be organized around a nucleus of Greek migrants, mainly merchants and mercenaries, but they would also include other groups of Orthodox Christians, such as Serbs, Albanians, and Morlachs.

These otherwise motley groups of migrants were united in their demand to establish religious institutions and practice freely the Greek rite, as well as in the material culture they produced and left behind. Older icons that the refugees salvaged from their homelands formed the earliest decorations for the newly founded Greek churches, while commissions to equip new church iconostases were usually issued to Adriatic-based workshops. Very frequently, it was the same painters that were most active in Catholic contexts that took up the bulk of these commissions, this time, however, pulling from their pictorial arsenal iconographic templates and styles of the Byzantine tradition to respond to the esthetic ideals of the Greek Orthodox Church and its diasporic communities.

Dating to the first half of the sixteenth century, the despotic icons from the church of St. Anne in Ancona are some of the earliest examples of a church commission in an Adriatic context. Since the church was bombed and demolished during World War II, the only icon that survives today is that of St. Anne with the Virgin and Child ([Figure 2.3](#)), while the remaining icons are only known from a black-and-white photograph. Still, the presence of shared stylistic features and iconographic motifs makes it possible to attribute unequivocally the entire set to the same hand, that of Permeniates.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, the icons exhibit Permeniates's distinctive mannerisms and iconographic conventions, yet they all stand in stark contrast to the artist's "signature" Italianate style, as they were executed in

the austere Byzantine tradition. For a Byzantine-trained Greek icon painter like Permeniates, having to “translate” his popular pictorial style to a strictly Byzantine visual vocabulary must have been perceived as being part of the job. The same cannot be claimed for another artist who was recruited by the Anconitan community, the renowned Venetian painter Lorenzo Lotto. Just a few decades after Permeniates's work, in 1551, Lotto was employed by the Greek Zuane de Argenta to paint three panels for the church of St. Anne. What is striking, however, is that despite his skill and fame, Lotto was not granted the least liberty to fulfill his work as he saw fit. Instead, as he emphasizes in his memoirs, he was “forced to draw in the Greek style” (*forzarme che tira alla grecha*).<sup>31</sup>

 A painting shows Madonna and St. Anne holding a child.

[Figure 2.3 Ioannes Permeniates, \*Madonna and Child with St. Anne\*, egg tempera on panel, ca. 1530, Museo Diocesano, Ancona \(provenance: church of St. Anne\).](#)


Source: Margarita Voulgaropoulou.

The aforementioned example makes it clear that the preservation of a stylistic Orthodoxy was an indisputable requirement for the Greek Church, and the same rigid rules applied to all artists involved in church decoration, regardless of origin, skill, or fame. When in 1589 the painter Ioannes Kyprios was commissioned to paint the dome of St. George of Venice, he was placed under the supervision of “the most illustrious Tintoretto.” Nevertheless, the confraternity needed to ensure that the work would be “painted according to what the true Greek art demands” (*ὡς ἀπαιτεῖ ἡ ἀληθῆς Ἑλληνικὴ τέχνη*) and explicitly stated that “the manner, garments, figures, and expressions be Greek.”<sup>32</sup> Likewise, when Jacopo Palma competed for the mosaic of St. George about a decade later, the selection committee was equally precise: the winning design should correspond to the “old customs and the devout Greek manner” (*all'uso antico e alla divota maniera greca*), in other words, it should reflect the tradition of Byzantine painting and the piety of the Greek Orthodox rite. For all his efforts to emulate the Byzantine style, the Venetian artist did not meet the

criteria of the confraternity and therefore lost to the Cretan icon painter Bathas.

Bathas, a close friend of the metropolitan of Philadelphia, based in Venice since 1577, was well aware of the esthetic priorities of the Greek confraternity and was perfectly capable of delivering the desired outcome. After all, the painter had acquired a great deal of popularity among the Greek communities of the Adriatic, having also worked for the churches of Sta. Maria degli Angeli in Barletta and St. Nicholas in Pula. In both cases, Bathas drew his models directly from the church of St. George in Venice, by copying older as well as contemporary works from the church and its iconostasis, namely two prized Palaiologan icons of Christ (which he used as models for his renditions of the Pantokrator) and the popular Hodegetria of Michael Damaskenos (which, in turn, reproduced an earlier Byzantine icon from the church collections). For the Greek communities of the Adriatic periphery, having their churches decorated by one of the most successful icon painters of Venice and modeled after the head church of the Greek diaspora was nothing short of a declaration of prestige and a means to assert equal status to the metropolis.

Toward the end of the century, the pronounced Orthodoxy of the Greek Church led to the gradual abandonment of earlier iconographic innovations in favor of an increased pictorial conservatism and a revival of earlier iconographic models. While painters like Damaskenos were able to introduce complex new iconographies and skillfully merge Western elements even when painting in the austere *maniera greca*, from around the 1600s, works for Orthodox audiences are devoid of earlier Latinisms and display a return to more traditional and conventional forms. This tendency is mostly observed in provincial and conservative milieus, such as those of the monastic institutions of the Dalmatian hinterland. A representative example is the group of despotic icons from the monastery church of Krupa that bear the signature of the Cretan Ioannes Apakas ([Figure 2.4](#)). Although dating around the turn of the seventeenth century, Apakas's works break away from the mannerist currents that were dominating late sixteenth-century icon painting and instead faithfully replicate fifteenth-century templates by Andreas Ritzos.<sup>33</sup>

 A wall of icons in the interior space of a church

[Figure 2.4 Ioannes Apakas, despotic icons, egg tempera on panel, ca. 1600, church of the Dormition of the Virgin, Krupa Monastery.](#)

*Source:* Margarita Voulgaropoulou.

## Conclusion

With an uninterrupted Byzantine presence since the sixth century, the societies of the broad region of the Adriatic Sea provided a fertile ground for the transplantation of Byzantine pictorial forms and techniques in the early modern period, as well as for the veneration of Eastern Christian icons. The intense commercial and diplomatic contacts with the Eastern Mediterranean and the Orthodox Balkans together with the geopolitical upheaval that was taking hold of Southeastern Europe in the aftermath of the Ottoman conquests prompted an unprecedented circulation of Eastern icons and icon painters in the region and sparked a renewed interest in Byzantinizing art forms among local Catholic audiences. As mosaic and fresco painting were in decline, from the mid-fifteenth century onward, icons were becoming increasingly popular and affordable to wider audiences, making their way into Catholic households and churches.

The emergence of this profitable new market saw a manifest change in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century icon painting, as artists were seeking to render their products more competitive by adapting them to the esthetic expectations of their ever-growing Catholic audiences. Already familiar with Italian painting styles and techniques, icon painters were incorporating late Gothic, Renaissance, and mannerist visual elements into traditional Byzantine templates or even attempting to fully emulate the Italian style of painting, especially in works intended for Catholic religious spaces. This experimentation with Western art engendered a variety of hybrid artistic forms that would dominate icon production in the Adriatic until the end of the sixteenth century.



Meanwhile, the displacement of Orthodox populations that followed the Ottoman-Venetian wars gradually altered the ethnoconfessional consistency of the Adriatic cities and shifted the priorities of icon painters. As Greek and Serbian Orthodox communities were being established throughout the entire Adriatic, from the mid-sixteenth century onward, a new market for post-Byzantine art was created in the region, Orthodox this time, which offered even greater professional opportunities for Byzantine-trained painters. Although icon painters would continue to create Italianized works for Catholic patrons, such occurrences were becoming increasingly scarce, as the better part of these artists' production was intended to equip the newly constructed Orthodox churches.

These dynamics would shift once again around the mid-seventeenth century. As Greeks were assimilating to the local Catholic societies or migrating to Greek-speaking territories, the Slavic element of the Orthodox communities was growing exponentially, especially in the eastern Adriatic coast. With the end of the second Morean war in 1718 and the inclusion of the Dalmatian hinterland into the Venetian state, large groups of Orthodox Serbs and Morlachs were integrated into the Orthodox communities, paving the way to their complete Slavicization. This dramatic demographic transition would launch a new market demand for Byzantinizing art in the region, but at the same time, it would incite yet another visible change in icon production. Although Greek artists were still receiving the lion's share of the commissions, in light of the new demographic dynamics, they were compelled to "translate" their visual vocabulary once again, this time to render it more familiar to their Slavic-speaking audiences. By the nineteenth century, Byzantine art had enjoyed a long life and an extended afterlife in the Adriatic region, and its reception had come a full circle. From the "Adrio-Byzantinisms" of the Middle Ages to the creation of local Latin, Greek, and Slavic brands of icon painting in the early modern times, the evolution of Byzantine and Byzantinizing art forms in the Adriatic epitomizes the sociopolitical fermentations of the period and the diverse transculturation processes that occurred between the different peoples that crossed paths in the region.

## Notes

1. [Fernand Braudel, \*The Mediterranean and The Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II\* \(Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995 \[1972\]\), 1:132.](#)
2. [Vera von Falkenhausen, \*La dominazione bizantina nell'Italia meridionale dal IX all'XI secolo\* \(Bari: Ecumenica editrice, 1978\); Željko Rapanić, "Istočna obala Jadrana u ranom srednjem vijeku \(Povijesna i povijesnoumjetnička razmatranja\)," \*Starohrvatska prosvjeta\* 3, no. 15 \(1985\): 7–30; Jadran Ferluga, "Vizantija i Jadransko more—razmišljanja na temu," \*Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog Instituta\* 29/30 \(1991\): 29–44; Ivo Goldstein, "Byzantine Presence on the Eastern Adriatic Coast \(6th–12th Century\)," \*Byzantinoslavica\* 57 \(1996\): 257–64; Ivo Goldstein, "Byzantium on the Adriatic from 550 till 800," \*Hortus Artium Medievalium\* 4, no. 4 \(1998\): 7–14; Sante Graciotti, "L' 'homo Adriaticus' di ieri e quello di domani," in \*Homo Adriaticus: Identità culturale e autocoscienza attraverso i secoli\*, eds. Nadia Falaschini, Sante Graciotti, and Sergio Sconocchia \(Reggio Emilia: Diabasis, 1998\), 11–26; Zdenka Janeković Römer, "On the Influence of Byzantine Culture on Renaissance Dubrovnik and Dalmatia," \*Dubrovnik Annals\* 11 \(2007\): 7–24; Francesco Borri, "L' Adriatico tra Bizantini, Longobardi e Franchi: Dalla conquista di Ravenna alla pace di Aquisgrana \(751–812\)," \*Bullettino dell'Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medioevo\* 112 \(2010\): 1–56.](#)
3. [Magdalena Skoblar and Judith Herrin's edited volume attempts to remedy this gap by addressing the relations between Byzantium and the Adriatic as a whole, still, however, with a scope that does not extend beyond the fifteenth century \(\*Byzantium, Venice and the Medieval Adriatic: Spheres of Maritime Power and Influence, c. 700–1453\* \[Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021\]\).](#)
4. [Donald MacGillivray Nicol, \*Byzantium and Venice: A Study in Diplomatic and Cultural Relations\* \(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988\); Anthony Cutler, "From Loot to Scholarship: Changing Modes in the Italian Response to Byzantine Artifacts, ca. 1200–1750," \*Dumbarton Oaks Papers\* 49 \(1995\): 237–67; Maria Georgopoulou, "Late Medieval Crete and Venice: An Appropriation of Byzantine Heritage," \*Art Bulletin\* 77, no. 3 \(1995\): 479–96; Francesca Flores d'Arcais, "Paolo Veneziano e la pittura del Trecento in Adriatico," in](#)

- Il Trecento Adriatico: Paolo Veneziano e la Pittura tra Oriente e Occidente*, eds. Francesca Flores d'Arcais and Giovanni Gentili (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana, 2002), 19–31; Elena Papastavrou, “Influences byzantines sur la peinture vénitienne du XIVe siècle,” in *Byzantium as Oecumene*, ed. Euaggelos Chrysos (Athens: Ethniko Idryma Ereunon, 2005), 257–78; Eugenia Drakopoulou, “Comments on the Artistic Interchange between Conquered Byzantium and Venice as well as on Its Political Background,” *Zograf* 36 (2012): 179–88.
5. A more detailed discussion on the heritage of Byzantine art in Southeastern Europe is provided in the first chapter of this volume by Ovidiu Cristea and Ovidiu Olar. For further information on the impact of Byzantine art in the Orthodox Balkans, see the other chapters in this volume, particularly those by Elisabeta Negrău, Vlad Bedros, and Elena-Dana Prioteasa, among others.
  6. Braudel, *Mediterranean*, 132.
  7. For a discussion on the concepts of eclecticism and hybridity, see the essays included in the volume *Eclecticism in Late Medieval Visual Culture at the Crossroads of the Latin, Greek, and Slavic Traditions*, eds. Maria Alessia Rossi and Alice Isabella Sullivan (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), in particular, the introduction (9–26) and Vlad Bedros's essay, “The “Hybrid” Iconography of the Agnus Dei in Moldavian Wall Paintings,” 199–220.
  8. For discussions on the term, see Dimiter Angelov, “Byzantinism: The Imaginary and Real Heritage of Byzantium in Southeastern Europe,” in *New Approaches to Balkan Studies*, eds. Dimitris Keridis, Ellen Bursac, and Nicholas Yatromanolakis (Dulles, VA: Brassey's, 2003), 3–21; Helena Bodin, “Whose Byzantium: Ours or Theirs? On the Issue of Byzantinism from a Cultural Semiotic Perspective,” in *The Reception of Byzantium in European Culture Since 1500*, eds. Prezemysław Marciniak and Dion C. Smythe (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 11–42.
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10. [Ejnar Dyggve, “Eigentümlichkeiten und Ursprung der frühmittelalterlichen Architektur in Dalmatien,” in \*Actes du XIIIe Congres International d’Histoire de l’Art\* \(Stockholm: Le Comité Organisateur du Congrès, 1933\), 109–11; Ejnar Dyggve, \*History of Salonitan Christianity\* \(Oslo: Aschehoug, 1951\); Igor Fisković, “Un contributo al riconoscimento degli affreschi ‘Adriobizantini’ sulla sponda croata meridionale,” \*Hortus Artium Medievalium\* 4 \(1998\): 71–83; Rosa Lorusso Romito, “Cultura figurativa ‘adriatica’ in Puglia tra XIV e XV secolo,” in \*Andar per mare: Puglia e Mediterraneo tra mito e storia\*, eds. Raffaella Cassano, Rosa Lorusso Romito, and Marisa Milella \(Bari: Adda 1998\), 351–68; Ivana Triva, “Ljubo Karaman ‘On the Paths of Byzantine Characteristics in Art’: Almost Sixty Years Later,” in \*Liminal Spaces of Art between Europe and the Middle East\*, ed. Ivana Prijatelj-Pavičić \(Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars, 2018\), 161–74.](#)
11. [Margarita Voulgaropoulou, “Transcending Borders, Transforming Identities: Travelling Icons and Icon Painters in the Adriatic Region,” \*Mobility, Movement and Medium: Crossing Borders in Art\*, special issue, \*re•bus\* 9 \(2020\): 23–73, at 28–29.](#)
12. [Pina Belli D’Elia, “Fra tradizione e rinnovamento: Le icone dall’XI al XIV secolo,” in \*Icone di Puglia e Basilicata dal Medioevo al Settecento\*, ed. Pina Belli D’Elia \(Milan: Mazzotta, 1988\), 19–30; Magdalena Skoblar, “Icons in the Adriatic before the Sack of Constantinople in 1204,” in \*Byzantium, Venice and the Medieval Adriatic\*, eds. Skoblar and Herrin, 245–75.](#)
13. [Anthi Andronikou, “A Panel in Search of Identity: The Madonna di Andria between Apulia and Cyprus,” in \*The Art and Archaeology of Lusignan and Venetian Cyprus \(1192–1571\): Recent Research and New Discoveries\*, eds. Michalis Olympios and Maria Parani \(Turnhout: Brepols, 2019\), 43–61.](#)
14. [Skoblar and Herrin, \*Byzantium, Venice and the Medieval Adriatic\*.](#)
15. [After the Fourth Crusade and the partition of the empire, the Doge of Venice officially assumed the title of “Dominus quartae partis et dimidiaie totius Imperii Romaniae.” See, Șerban Marin, “Dominus quartae partis et dimidiaie totius imperii Romaniae: The Fourth Crusade and the Dogal Title in the Venetian Chronicles’](#)

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  18. Margarita Voulgaropoulou, “From Domestic Devotion to the Church Altar: Venerating Icons in the Late Medieval and Early Modern Adriatic,” *Religions* 10, no. 6/390 (2019): 1–41, at 6–10. See also Alexander Nagel, *The Controversy of Renaissance Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 21–23; Rembrandt Duits, “Byzantine Icons in the Medici Collection,” in *Byzantine Art and Renaissance Europe*, eds. Angeliki Lymberopoulou and Rembrandt Duits (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 157–88.
  19. Nagel, *Controversy of Renaissance Art*, 21–22; Duits, “Byzantine Icons,” 170.
  20. Cutler, “From Loot to Scholarship,” 251; Rembrandt Duits, “Una icona pulcra: The Byzantine Icons of Cardinal Pietro Barbo,” in *Mantova e il Rinascimento italiano: Studi in onore di David S. Chambers*, eds. Philippa Jackson, Guido Rebecchini, and David Chambers (Mantova: Sometti, 2011), 127–41; Nagel, *Controversy of Renaissance Art*, 21; Duits, “Byzantine Icons,” 157–88; Maria Raffaella Menna, “Sulla disposizione delle icone bizantine nella collezione del cardinale Pietro Barbo,” in *Curiosa itinera: Scritti Daniela Gallavotti Cavallero*, ed. Enrico Parlato (Rome: Ginevra Bentivoglio Editori, 2015), 101–11; Voulgaropoulou, “From Domestic Devotion,” 390.
  21. There is no need to repeat here the widely cited 1499 case in which three icon painters from Candia were commissioned to deliver seven hundred icons of the Virgin within a period of roughly a month. Mario Cattapan, “Nuovi elenchi e documenti dei pittori in Creta dal 1300 al 1500,” *Thesaurismata* 9 (1972): 202–35, at 211–15.
  22. Michele Bacci, “Veneto-Byzantine ‘Hybrids’: Towards A Reassessment,” *Studies in Iconography* 35 (2014): 73–106.
  23. Voulgaropoulou, “Transcending Borders,” 23–73.

24. [Francesca Coltrinari, “Due schede documentarie sulla pittura e la scultura a Recanati nel Quattrocento,” \*Annali della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia dell’Università di Macerata\* 38 \(2005\): 73–96; Margarita Voulgaropoulou, “A ‘Lost’ Panel and a Missing Link: Angelos Bitzamanos and the Case of the Scottivoli Altarpiece for the Church of San Francesco delle Scale in Ancona,” \*Arts\* 10, no. 3/44 \(2021\): 1–32, at 20.](#)
25. [Voulgaropoulou, “‘Lost’ Panel,” 1–32.](#)
26. [Voulgaropoulou, “Transcending Borders,” 23–73 \(with literature\); Voulgaropoulou, “‘Lost’ Panel,” 22–23.](#)
27. [Martin Soria, “Algunos pintores ‘madoneros’ venecianos,” \*Goya\* 39 \(1960\): 180–88; Lionello Puppi, “Il Greco giovane e altri pittori ‘madonneri’ di maniera italiana a Venezia nella seconda metà del cinquecento,” \*Prospettive\* 27 \(1963\): 25–46; Panagiotis Ioannou, “The Modena Triptych and the Question of the Madonneri,” in \*International Conference El Greco: The Cretan Years\* \(Heraklion: IMK, 2014\), 47–50 \(summaries\); Voulgaropoulou, “Transcending Borders,” 50.](#)
28. [Manolis Chatzidakis, “Το έργο του Θωμά Βαθά ή Μπαθά και η divota maniera greca” \[The work of Thomas Bathas and the \*divota maniera greca\*\], \*Thesaurismata\* 14 \(1977\): 239–50; Voulgaropoulou, “Transcending Borders,” 48.](#)
29. [Chatzidakis, “Work of Thomas Bathas,” 239–50.](#)
30. [Margarita Voulgaropoulou, “Η ζωγραφική βυζαντινότροπων εικόνων στις δύο ακτές της Αδριατικής: η περίπτωση του Ιωάννη Περμενιάτη” \[Byzantinizing icon painting in both Adriatic coasts: The case of Ioannes Permeniates\], \*Egnatia\* 14 \(2010\): 195–211; Voulgaropoulou, “Transcending Borders,” 47.](#)
31. [Pietro Zampetti, ed., \*Libro di Spese Diverse\* \(Venice: Istituto per la collaborazione culturale, 1969\), 206–7, 348; Voulgaropoulou, “Transcending Borders,” 42.](#)
32. [Konstantinos Mertzios, \*Θωμάς Φλαγγίνης καὶ ὁ Μικρός Ἑλληνομνήμων\* \[Thomas Flanginis and the small recorder of Greek affairs\] \(Athens: The Academy of Athens, 1939\), 238.](#)
33. [Voulgaropoulou, “Transcending Borders,” 47.](#)

# 3 Art and Architecture in the Balkans and the Lower Danube Regions

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Architecture and monumental art in the Balkans and the lower Danube regions reveal the complexities of creative practices and values between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries. The art of the thirteenth century is Christian and navigates the nexus of the Byzantine, Latin, and South Slavic domains. By the end of the sixteenth century, the religious artistic landscape was largely Islamic and Ottoman. Through analysis of selected examples of churches and their painting programs, this chapter highlights major design concepts in religious art and architecture, the mobility of painting and building workshops, artistic innovation, the transfer and adjustment of creative ideas, modalities of patronage (royal, aristocratic, religious, and monastic; familial and individual; male and female), relationships between artists and donors, and the themes that were selected to shape the artistic projects.

Set against complex geohistorical, sociopolitical, religious, and cultural contexts, the material evidence points to the dissolution of the Byzantine Empire and regional Christian polities as decisive in understanding the art and architecture in the Balkans and the lower Danube regions.<sup>1</sup> Byzantine culture was highly aspirational, and among the South Slavs, it mostly impacted the realm of religion and literature but also the highly dynamic architectural and artistic scene.<sup>2</sup> At the beginning of the thirteenth century, following the Fourth Crusade, artists gradually left Constantinople in search for new opportunities. Separate architectural and artistic practices sponsored by the Byzantine rulers emerged in their newly established centers in Nicaea and Epirus.<sup>3</sup> Arguably, these events gave additional impetus for growing artistic ambitions in the Balkans.

With the advance of the Ottoman Turks starting in the mid-fourteenth century, the religious landscape became increasingly Islamic.<sup>4</sup> When, in 1453, Constantinople became the new Ottoman capital, the Byzantine Empire formally ceased to exist. The following swift reshaping of the religious landscape in the remaining territories of the western Balkans and northern territories along the Danube River included the South Slavic domains. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, churches and, to a lesser extent, synagogues were still built along with major Islamic projects.<sup>5</sup> Many of the extant churches were founded in medieval Serbia, Bosnia, Wallachia, Moldavia, and Hungary.

By the seventeenth century, however, Ottomans reneged on their initially open policy of religious coexistence. Jewish communities, traditionally tied to urban centers, could not prosper anymore, and their synagogues have been irretrievably lost. At this time, in the central Balkans within Ottoman territories, the construction of Islamic buildings increased while simultaneously the creation of Christian buildings sharply declined. The creation of Christian buildings continued in the northern territories of the Balkans, along the Danube River, to the south of the Danube in the Morava Valley, and to the north in the lower Pannonia basin. In each case, distinct artistic solutions emerged in these territories.

The following sections present examples of Christian architecture and monumental arts within distinct locales of the central Balkans and lower Danube regions in the period between the early thirteenth and the late sixteenth centuries. Select examples of monasteries and churches and their architectural and artistic themes are presented together as micro-units, allowing for understanding the long life of a singular site and the level of artistic adaptations and changes, rather than focusing only on the selected site at the time of its creation. Hence, the first section highlights solutions and themes in selected examples of newly established monasteries and churches in the central Balkans, beginning in the thirteenth century, when the religious landscape was firmly Christian at the cusp of Byzantine, Latin, and Slavic values. This section also presents the major adaptations that transpired within these sites until the end of the sixteenth century, when the central Balkans became an Ottoman domain. The second section presents the shifting Christian landscape toward the northern regions and



innovative artistic trends that emerged there at the threshold of the fifteenth century. The third section accentuates the conditions of the construction of new Christian sites in both the central Balkans and the lower Danube regions in the sixteenth century, during the Ottoman presence.

## **New Forms of Patronage and Design Concepts in the Balkans**

In the central Balkans, Studenica Monastery presents an excellent case study through which to examine the complexities of patronage, the mixture of various functions of ecclesiastical foundations, the vibrant exchange of architectural and artistic practices, and the creation of unique solutions and meanings in architecture and monumental art. Studenica Monastery, the most holy site of the Serbs, promoted the unprecedented concept of patronage by a joint ruler-monk-saint. The monastery was established in 1183 by Grand Župan Stefan Nemanja (r. 1169–96), a local ruler and founder of his own dynasty, who became a monk in 1196, and shortly after his death in 1199, was canonized as St. Simeon the Myrrh-Streaming.<sup>6</sup> The major monastic church (katholikon), dedicated to the Mother of God, served as Simeon's mausoleum. The church was finished posthumously before 1208–9, as based on the fresco inscription in Church Slavonic.<sup>7</sup>

Medieval hagiographies of St. Simeon and the monastic charter for Studenica highlight the inspiring monastic precedents from the wider Mediterranean region. St. Simon's son, St. Sava (1175–1236), was the first archbishop of the independent Serbian Church (founded in 1219), and he visited many of these Christian sites in person. Among the monasteries are the still-standing sixth-century Great Lavra of St. Sabas the Sanctified near Jerusalem, the tenth-century Great Lavra, and Vatopedi on Mount Athos, as well as the monastery of the Mother of God Evergetis, founded in 1049, in the suburbs of Constantinople, which was used by the Orthodox monks during the Latin occupation but was lost by the thirteenth century.<sup>8</sup>

Constantinopolitan, Athonite, and Palestinian influences are recognizable within the liturgy and church legislation of Studenica Monastery but also within its architecture and topographical setting of the site.<sup>9</sup> Medieval

monastic cells and cave hermitages, typical for the Holy Land and Mount Athos, have been found in the cliffs surrounding Studenica, pointing to expanded notions of sacred space beyond the monastic enclosure and to the attempt to live symbiotically with the natural environment. The architectural solution of a monastic compound based on the cross-in-circle plan is unique, however ([Figure 3.1](#)). The monastery has roughly circular walls circumscribing a central cross, symbolizing its dedication to the Mother of God, who is the embodiment of the Church.<sup>10</sup> The katholikon's twelve towers also reference the Heavenly Jerusalem as it is described in the Bible (Rev. 21:12ff). Despite having more of a circular than a rectangular shape (as is specified in Revelations), the masonry of the enclosure wall is symbolic of the celestial city and plays a rather limited defensive role. Together with the hermit cells along the monastic walls, the large gate flanked by a pair of semicircular towers that faces the central church suggests an earthly recreation of the Heavenly Jerusalem.<sup>11</sup>

An aerial view of the Studenica Monastery in Serbia, surrounded by tall trees and farmlands.

[Figure 3.1 Studenica Monastery, twelfth century, Serbia.](#)

*Source:* Dušan Danilović.

The monastic church with its twelve-sided dome, symbolic of the heavenly microcosm, housed a sacred relic of the True Cross and a miracle-working icon of the Mother of God, reinforcing its associations with the Heavenly Jerusalem.<sup>12</sup> Architecturally, this bright church with good acoustics demonstrates elements of both Byzantine and Romanesque styles. The two solutions are usually differentiated based on construction, building technique, the use of brick or stone as materials, and secondary formal stylistic elements, such as the shape of arches, portals, and windows; architectural sculpture; and other decorative features. The architectural form of the single-nave Studenica Church, with its square naos and a tripartite sanctuary typical of Byzantine-rite churches, results from a condensed form of the Middle Byzantine cross-in-square church.<sup>13</sup> Known as an atrophied Greek-cross church, the lateral arms of the cross are reduced to narrow barrel vaults, essentially becoming massive arches that

project from structural piers. The church includes paradigmatic, highly sophisticated features referencing Constantinopolitan imperial architecture, such as the internally ribbed dome, the use of lead to cover the dome instead ceramic tiles, the use of semicircular tympana with large high-shouldered triple windows, the application of exterior arches that point to the interior structure, and the use of the recessed-brick construction technique, in which alternate courses of brick are concealed by a thick layer of mortar to imitate the alternation of brick and stone.

Two different workshops were responsible for the construction of Studenica Church, which presents two construction phases. Apparently, masons from Italy or Kotor (which was an integral part of medieval Serbia at the time) finished the lower portions of the church in marble and stone with superb architectural carving. The distinguishing three-light mullioned windows found in the sanctuaries of Studenica and the cathedral in Kotor (which contrasts to typical single- or two-light windows of Romanesque Italian churches) suggest that builders and sculptors with similar training worked at both locales.<sup>14</sup> The employment of practitioners from coastal cities on projects in the interior of medieval Serbia is confirmed by the example of a Franciscan friar from Kotor, Fra Vito, who built the church in Dečani (1327–35).<sup>15</sup>

Following the Latin conquest of Constantinople in 1204, Byzantine builders and painters were in search of new projects and donors. Presumably, a Constantinopolitan building workshop was responsible for the second construction phase of Studenica Church and its dome.<sup>16</sup> Painters from either Constantinople or Thessaloniki painted the interior of Studenica. The raised canopylike core at the crossing of the church has Byzantine all-brick construction for the arches and pendentives that support the cylindrical drum and the dome, instead of the barrel vaults made of tufa used in lower sections of the church, which were executed in the manner of structures from the Adriatic Littoral.<sup>17</sup> Externally, the drum is enlivened by twelve colonnettes and connected by a double-recessed rippled eave that frames twelve windows within arched niches, thus revealing the long-lived Roman imperial and Byzantine technique of layering masonry. Internally, the dome is scalloped, recalling the twelfth-century church construction of the Constantinopolitan Chora Monastery.


By 1233, King Radoslav (r. 1228–34) had commissioned and painted a spacious, beautifully proportioned exonarthex to the west of Studenica.<sup>18</sup> Strong Serbo-Byzantine family ties suggest that this addition was based on Byzantine ideas; King Radoslav, a grandson of Stefan Nemanja and the Byzantine emperor Alexios III Angelos (r. 1195–1203), was married to Anna, the daughter of the Byzantine ruler of Epirus and Thessaloniki. However, the architecture of the Holy Land and of the wider Mediterranean may provide a better understanding of the structure and its sacred meaning.<sup>19</sup> Built in stone and featuring rib vaults, the exonarthex and its two side chapels almost doubled the size of the church. Originally, the exonarthex was whitewashed and painted to mimic the construction of the rest of the church; its side chapels were modeled after the main church dome. The construction and painting of the dome of Studenica Church and its exonarthex were undoubtedly supervised by St. Sava, the son of Stefan Nemanja and the uncle of Radoslav, suggesting modes for the transfer of artistic concepts. As a prince and later religious leader, St. Sava was a prominent intellectual deeply engaged with the meanings and program of Christian Orthodox art beyond ethnoreligious divides.

The new interest in monumental painting in the central Balkans at the beginning of the thirteenth century coincided with the painting of Studenica Church. Prominent Byzantine artists were engaged to paint the church in 1208–9. The rich iconography is augmented with liturgical and poetic texts that adhere to the trends of contemporaneous wall painting in Thessaloniki and Constantinople.<sup>20</sup> The selection and arrangement of themes in thirteenth-century mural painting, including those from Studenica but also those in Boyana and Ivanovo in Bulgaria, are predominantly based on the decorative program of Byzantine churches.<sup>21</sup> The program consisted of Eucharistic themes in the sanctuary, the Great Feasts in the nave, and usually the Last Judgment and the scenes from the Passion of Christ in the narthex. Within this general system, individual choices were incorporated, primarily involving scenes from the lives of particular saints and their unique arrangement, which unequivocally disclose the requests of the founder or creator of the program.

The connection between worship and the oldest painting in Studenica is particularly prominent. Several factors influenced the formation of the

thirteenth-century church painting program that can be clearly traced in Studenica: the function, the dedication, and the very architecture of the church. Built as a monastic church and mausoleum, the funerary character of Studenica influenced the conception of the eschatological thematic program. For the first time in Studenica, a cycle is represented from the life of Saint Simeon Nemanja, the founder of the Nemanjić dynasty, in the lateral chapel dedicated to this saint. Also novel is the painting of the donor's portrait as well as the horizontal family tree of the Nemanjić dynasty.<sup>22</sup>

Stylistically, the painting in Studenica represents a clear break from late Komnenian art. The large human figures are painted with dignified poses and facial expressions, differing from the elongated, almost mannerist figures of the Komnenian style. Monumentality in Studenica's art is achieved by the implementation of a particular compositional solution regarding the format of the scenes as well as the treatment and organization of the figures. The outcome is best exemplified in the Crucifixion painted on the west wall of the western bay ([Figure 3.2](#)). A special feature of Studenica's wall paintings is their lavish backgrounds. The scenes in the altar area are set against a yellow background that was once covered in gold leaf with an engraved imitation of mosaic tesserae. The luxurious blue base, especially emphasized in the Crucifixion scene, is probably based on the use of the precious blue mineral pigment made of lapis lazuli.

 The painted decoration of the interior space of a church

[Figure 3.2 The Crucifixion of Christ, mural painting, 1208–9, naos, west wall, the church of the Mother of God, Studenica Monastery, Serbia.](#)

*Source:* Ljubomir Milanović.

The original painting of Studenica suffered over the centuries, but the iconographic program was restored during a large-scale reconstruction effort in the sixteenth century. The repainting of the original murals of the church of the Mother of God in Studenica in 1568 was part of the attempt to revitalize church monuments within areas of the restored patriarchate of Peć. In 1557, during the reign of the Ottoman sultan Suleyman I (1520–66),

the autocephalous Serbian Church was reinstated. Many damaged or destroyed churches were renovated. This renovation included some of the most important projects, starting with the painting of the narthex in the seat of the patriarchate (1565), then the painting of new frescoes in the katholikon of Mileševa (1567–68) and in the narthex of Gračanica (1570). According to the inscription preserved on the north wall under the composition of the Dormition of the Mother of God, the restoration in Studenica was financed by its hegumenos, Simeon, together with his brothers. In addition to the restoration of the existing painting, the sixteenth-century painters introduced some new scenes.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, during the absence of local rulers under the Ottomans, it was common for Church leaders to pair with local aristocracy or completely take over the funding of art initiatives.

Nemanja's heirs built and decorated their foundational monasteries “in the image of Studenica.”<sup>24</sup> Even if they were usually grouped according to family lineage and patronage or by geographic region, the surviving monuments display the inconsistency of stylistic groupings. The architecture and art of Studenica were not directly replicated. Rather, as surviving Serbian medieval texts and monasteries confirm, the artists and architects of these later monuments adapted Studenica's impact in creative and complex ways to echo its visual and spiritual presence. Mileševa (1222–28), Sopoćani (1272–76), Gradac (ca. 1280), Arilje (1296), Gračanica (ca. 1321), Dečani (1327–35), Ravanica (1376–77), and Manasija (Resava) (1406–18) are some of these major monasteries with lavishly designed churches crowned by high central domes that rise above the sacred space encircled by monastic walls. Like at Studenica, the materialization of these churches demonstrates singular combinations of various formal features of medieval architecture often associated with Byzantine, Romanesque, or proto-Gothic styles. Their monumental paintings similarly showcase the vibrancy of artistic practices originally stemming from Byzantine sources and enriched with innovations. For example, eschatological scenes in funerary churches of the Nemanjić rulers appear most often above the grave itself but also in a vicinity of the burial site. This kind of thematic program was transmitted via the important royal endowments of the thirteenth century, including Sopoćani.

If Studenica is representative of the thematic choices, arrangements, and stylistic features of painting at the beginning of the thirteenth century, then painting in Sopoćani Monastery represents its peak. In Sopoćani, an endowment of King Stefan Uroš I (r. 1243–76), the church of the Holy Trinity followed the architectural concept of a single-nave, domed structure and was built in a recognizable Romanesque idiom. Probably painted between 1272 and 1276, its oldest construction is preserved in the nave and the narthex of the church. A larger group of top Constantinopolitan painters created a program perfectly adapted to the hybrid structure of the Byzantine-Romanesque church type. Two most talented painters worked in the church sanctuary where they illustrated scenes related to the Eucharist and Christ's appearances after the Resurrection. In the nave, under the dome, are depicted events from Christ's life from the Annunciation to the Transfiguration. The program of the western bay, similar to other Nemanjić endowments, is related to the themes of death and resurrection. The western part of the church with the founder's grave is decorated with the procession of the Nemanjić family. The four lateral chapels are dedicated to the most-revered patron saints: Stephen, Simeon Nemanja, Nicholas, and George. The chapel dedicated to Simeon Nemanja contains painted scenes from his life. In the narthex of Sopoćani Church, in addition to the usual scene of the Last Judgment, the historical composition of the death of Queen Anna, the mother of the church's founder, appears on the north wall. The other walls of the narthex show the Tree of Jesse, the story of Joseph, and historical themes of the Ecumenical Councils and the local Serbian synod against the heretics.

The thirteenth-century artists mastered the space well, including an appropriate architectural or painted frame for each scene or individual figure. The figures of the saints are painted monumentally, with restrained movements and gentle facial expressions, as is best expressed in the scene of the Dormition of the Mother of God on the western wall of the nave. Clothes are depicted in warm pastel colors with long pleats that fall softly along the contours of the body. The details point to older sources of painting, revealing a Hellenistic spirit.<sup>25</sup> The background on the frescoes of the altar, nave, and narthex feature gold-colored ground of faux tesserae.<sup>26</sup> Certain scenes are framed by colored stucco decoration. The superb painting of Sopoćani attests to the highly sophisticated court art of the

central Balkans in the thirteenth century. The Sopoćani exonarthex was built and painted in the fourteenth century by artists commissioned by Stefan Dušan, King of Serbia from 1335 to 1346 and later Emperor of the Serbs, Greeks, Arbanas (Albanians), and Bulgarians from 1346 to 1355. His family portrait is on the eastern wall.

The favorable sociopolitical situation in the Balkans enabled a freer exchange of artists and direct contact with the latest trends in Byzantine painting in the fourteenth century, during the so-called Palaiologan Renaissance. Serbian King Stefan Uroš II Milutin (r. 1282–1321) built and painted the church dedicated to the Mother of God in Gračanica.<sup>27</sup> The church is a masterpiece of the architectural form of a five-domed structure based on a nine-square grid, with a central doubled cross-in-square unit, one inscribed inside the other. The exceptional architectural pyramidal modeling and verticality articulated by a canopied central core with a high dome, together with the structure's overall harmonious proportions, point to highly sophisticated geometric principles used in the church design. The church was painted between 1318 and 1321. The artists faced the complex task of painting a building of an inscribed cross type with an extremely elevated dome. The restrained painting program of the thirteenth century was abandoned in favor of new themes. The parables and miracles of Christ, including their comments and poetic interpretations, had gained importance in this period.<sup>28</sup> The dedication of the church and its function as an episcopal seat demanded scenes that glorify the Mother of God and emphasize her role in the Incarnation and in devotional practice. There was also an increase in the number of scenes of Christ post-Resurrection.

The impact of the liturgy on painting is particularly pronounced in the central dome with the representation of Christ Pantokrator and the Heavenly Liturgy. Numerous Christological and theological cycles are arranged in the form of friezes in the church interior. The number of Christian saints depicted is multiplied and includes holy women.<sup>29</sup> In Gračanica Church, the eschatological theme took an important place. The Ascent into Heaven is placed above the triumphal arch, and the Last Judgment is depicted in the western part of the nave. The ktetor's portrait with a model of the church is represented on the passage between the narthex and the nave ([Figure 3.3](#)). His wife, the Byzantine princess Simonis



(Simonida), is portrayed on the opposite wall. The text of the original chrysobull, a decree issued to the monastery, is painted on the western wall of the southern chapel. In the narthex, the program consists of a new vertical genealogical lineage of Nemanjić ancestors and includes scenes from the Menologion, an ecclesiastical calendar.

 A mural painting shows King Milutin holding a church model.


[Figure 3.3 King Milutin with the church, mural painting, 1318–21, narthex, east wall, the church of the Mother of God, Gračanica Monastery, Serbia.](#)

*Source:* Ljubomir Milanović.

The complexity and greater number of scenes in Gračanica influenced the style of painting. The expanded number of themes led to a reduction in size of the panels as well as the represented participants. The narrative nature of the scenes is amplified. These factors led to a change in the paintings' composition. The figures are presented with slender, elongated proportions. The animal world is depicted naturalistically. The juxtaposition between the background of the painted architecture in inverse perspective and the figures emphasizes the three-dimensionality of the scenes. The learned painters of King Milutin used antique models as the source for the canonical proportions of the human body. They created an entire iconographic dictionary of personifications and metaphors, which was necessary to present the abstract ideas of Church theologians and poets.<sup>30</sup>

Wall paintings from the sixteenth century were created in two phases and appear in the exonarthex. These paintings remain in poor condition, making it almost impossible to reconstruct the entire program. The early sixteenth-century frescos have been preserved in a few places, showing the Second Ecumenical Council, the angel of the Great Council, and sections of the Baptism scene and the Akathistos hymn to the Mother of God. The younger layer of frescoes was created in 1570. The patrons were Patriarch Makarije Sokolović (1557–71) and his cousin Antonije, metropolitan of Herzegovina. The program is complex, dominated by themes of Mary, Mother of God, with new iconographic patterns. The great prayer, the Deesis, is painted on the east wall as a shortened version of the Last

Judgment. The episcopal character of the church is accentuated by the portrayals of Serbian archbishops and patriarchs, starting with St. Sava in the lower zone of the north side. Also depicted is the historical scene of the death of Metropolitan Dionisije showing the funeral rite ([Figure 3.4](#)). Although the paintings were created in the sixteenth century, the selection of themes and the arrangement of episodes are based on older Byzantine models. Theological knowledge is evident in the selection of topics as well as in the individual figures of saints related to the very function of the church.

 A mural painting depicts the death scene of Metropolitan Dionisije. The corpse is surrounded by individual figures of saints.

[Figure 3.4 Death of Metropolitan Dionisije, mural painting, sixteenth century, exonarthex, west wall, the church of the Mother of God, Gračanica Monastery, Serbia.](#)

*Source:* Ljubomir Milanović.

Of significance for the massive sixteenth-century renewal of church architecture and arts is the restoration of the Peć patriarchate in 1557 thanks to the Ottoman statesman of Serbian origin, Sokollu Mehmed Pasha (1505–79), brother of the patriarch Makarije and cousin of Antonije Sokolović, metropolitan of Herzegovina (in office 1557–71) and later patriarch of Peć (in office 1571–74). Sokollu Mehmed Pasha was a novice in Mileševa Monastery when he was taken by the Ottomans and became a Janissary.<sup>31</sup> He converted to Islam but negotiated on behalf of the unconverted Serbs, one of the largest Christian communities in the Ottoman empire, allowing them to run their own Church affairs.<sup>32</sup> By the mid-seventeenth century, the jurisdiction of the Peć patriarchate included parts of modern-day Hungary, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania, Northern Macedonia, and Bulgaria.<sup>33</sup>

In terms of artistic quality, the paintings of the exonarthex of Gračanica, executed during the restored Peć patriarchate, constitute one of the best ensembles found in the sixteenth-century Balkans. They are characterized

by sharp drawing, clear proportions, and expressive figural gestures. The figures are monumental and have individualized facial features. Stylistically similar to the Gračanica frescoes are those from the sixteenth-century restoration in Studenica and the Peć patriarchate. As in Studenica, the painters in Gračanica treated older preserved frescoes with respect and, where possible, only restored them to their original states.<sup>34</sup>

## **Innovative Artistic Trends in the Balkans and the Lower Danube Regions**

Due to Ottoman advances from the fourteenth century onward, the centers of artistic creation gradually moved north of the Balkans. New capital cities were established in Kruševac, Belgrade, and Smederevo. From the 1370s onward, triconch churches with long-established associations with structures on Mount Athos and in Byzantium became prevalent in the Morava Valley and the Romanian principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia.<sup>35</sup> Sumptuously decorated with carved sculpture on the exterior and extensive wall paintings on the interior, these churches point to artistic trends in the wider region.


Preserved monumental paintings at the turn of the fifteenth century reflect the taste of members of the upper social ranks. Women were also important patrons actively engaged in artistic choices. Painters of this period accepted and developed the traditions nurtured in the Balkans during the fourteenth century. What stands out about this painting is its diversity, which speaks of the circulation of a significant number of painting workshops from various regions. The paintings mostly have a calmer classical expression. The selection of themes is reduced compared to previous periods.

Princess Milica (1335–1405) commissioned paintings for her royal burial endowment, the Ljubostinja Monastery, which was dedicated to the Dormition of the Mother of God. Painting was done in two stages. The first layer, preserved only in the dome and pendentives, is from the fourteenth or the beginning of the fifteenth centuries. The figures are poorly done, possibly in haste. The characters have unusual features, sometimes appearing deformed with prominent eyes. The color range is limited. The

second layer of paintings in the nave and narthex of the church was created between 1406 and 1408, after the death of the foundress. In the narthex, the lower zone preserves the portraits of members of the Lazarević family and the intercession of Mary, Mother of God, St. Peter, and John the Evangelist. The second zone bears scenes of the Ecumenical Councils. In the nave, the lower zone represents full figures of saints. The portrait of the foundress, now destroyed, was on the western wall. In the second zone are scenes of the Ministry of Christ. Above are episodes from the Passion of Christ and the Annunciation. In the area of the altar, where the Great Feasts should be, the painting is destroyed. The fifteenth-century decoration of the church and the narthex was done by a group of painters led by the master Makaris. The scenes are narrative. The figures are disproportionate, with small heads and elongated limbs. The architecture and furniture in the scenes abound in detail, and the compositions are overcrowded with figures. The background is quite shallow and thus most of the action takes place in the foreground.<sup>36</sup>

Around 1418, considerably better painters worked on the endowment of despot Stefan (r. 1402–27) in the Holy Trinity Church of Resava Monastery, which was also his burial church. In the narthex, only a few fragments of the Menologion and the representation of the Ecumenical Councils remain preserved. In the lower zones of the nave are standing figures of holy warriors. Their number is large, which is likely a response to the turbulent times and the Turkish encroachments ([Figure 3.5](#)). Thematically, scenes of the miracles and parables of Christ are extensive. In the higher zones are the mural scenes from the cycles of the Great Feasts, Christ's childhood, his Passion, and the life of the Mother of God. Since it is a five-domed church, the Old Testament and angelic figures of cherubim and seraphim are painted in the four smaller domes. The main dome has Old Testament figures and prophets in the lower sections, while the Heavenly Liturgy appears in the upper part. The central dome used to also bear a bust of Christ Pantokrator. In the altar space are depicted scenes of the Officiating Bishops with St. Sava as a participant, then the Communion of the Apostles, and, as a novelty, scenes from the life of the Mother of God and Christ's appearances after the Resurrection. A portrait of the ktetor, Despot Stefan, holding a miniature replica of his endowment, a scroll, and a scepter in his hands, is on the west wall. The painting of Resava Monastery was done by the best available painters at the time, connoisseurs

of the classical tradition, who were ready to integrate contemporary novelties. As a reminiscence of the Nemanjić endowments of the thirteenth century, all the frescoes glow in gold and azure colors. The drawing is clear and precise. The scenes are set in a complex architectural space that is arranged in multiple plans as well as in a landscape that convincingly provides the sense of spatial depth. The figures are elegant and dignified, lavishly dressed, and surrounded by details from the life of nobles at that time. The painting of the figures leans toward classicism. The clothes painted with soft folds follow the contours of the body. The faces of the saints have almost portraitlike features. Mural painting stylistically similar to Resava was preserved in Thessaloniki, especially in the church dedicated to the prophet Elijah.<sup>37</sup>

 A mural painting shows three saints in warrior attire, holding swords and spears.

[Figure 3.5 Warrior saints \(St. Aretas, St. Nestor, and St. Nicetas\), mural painting, ca. 1418, naos, west side of the north choir, the Holy Trinity Church, Resava Monastery, Serbia.](#)

*Source:* Ljubomir Milanović.

## Christian Art and Architecture within Ottoman Predominance

Construction of churches continued in medieval Serbia, Bosnia, Wallachia, and Moldavia, even in the sixteenth century when these territories became Ottoman domains.<sup>38</sup> The remaining material evidence of churches points to their modest construction away from urban hubs, in remote locations, and usually within monastic communities.<sup>39</sup> The church of St. Nicholas at Lapušnja Monastery built in 1500–10 reveals the realities of the mixed cross-cultural patronage of Serbian and Wallachian rulers, aristocrats, and monks.<sup>40</sup> Their architectural choice of the triconch church prevailing in monastic Athonite architecture and distinct from the Islamic Ottoman solutions reinforced Orthodox Christian identity.<sup>41</sup> The tiny sixteenth-


century single-nave church of the Mother of God in the village of Kovačevo, near Novi Pazar, was entirely built in stone.<sup>42</sup> It reveals a peculiar Christian-Islamic architectural solution. A niche with an Islamic arch is placed centrally above the main church entrance, articulated with a deeply carved architectural frame in a manner used for entrances in contemporaneous mosques ([Figure 3.6](#)).

 An exterior view of the Church of the Mother of God, Serbia.

[Figure 3.6 Church of the Mother of God in Kovačevo, sixteenth century, Serbia.](#)

*Source:* Marina Mihaljević.

After the fall of the Serbian state in 1459, the majority of artists, together with much of the population, migrated to the north, to the region of Srem. At the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth centuries, massive migrations prompted monastic retreats, which led to the establishment of a series of monasteries on Fruška Gora. Monasteries became artistic and spiritual centers north of the Sava and Danube, with strong influence on the Orthodox population in the Ottoman Empire. The most prestigious among the monasteries was Krušedol, the endowment of the last Orthodox Serbian despots from the Branković family. Krušedol consists of two units, a men's monastery with a church dedicated to the Annunciation founded by Bishop Maksim Branković (1461–1516) ([Figure 3.7](#)) and a women's monastery with a church dedicated to the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple built by Maksim's mother, the despotess Angelina (ca. 1440–1520). In addition to being the family mausoleum, Krušedol was the primary religious seat of the metropolitan of Belgrade.<sup>43</sup>

 An exterior view of the Krušedol Monastery, built in the sixteenth century.

[Figure 3.7 Krušedol Monastery, katholikon, sixteenth century, Serbia.](#)

*Source:* Ljubomir Milanović.

The monumental painting of the main Krušedol church was created between the mid-sixteenth and the mid-eighteenth centuries. Painting began in the narthex in 1543, based on the inscription. The painting program is partially known because of later repainting of the oldest layers. Hence, only the lower zones are original. In the lowest zone are depicted standing figures. Above them appear the Ecumenical Councils. It is assumed that the Akathistos hymn was on the north and south walls. The thoughtfully painted program was based on established conventions that considered the dedication and function of the church. The Deesis on the eastern wall of the narthex is traditional. In Krušedol, the scene included the saints of the house of Nemanjić to the south and the saints of the house of Branković from Srem to the north. A similar juxtaposition of the two ruling families portrayed on two facing walls is attested in the thirteenth-century church of St. Nicholas at Boyana in Bulgaria. The painters of the Krušedol narthex were local masters who wrote the texts in Church Slavonic.

The painting of the nave was created in 1545, confirmed by the inscription above the entrance door. It was later repainted. The preserved parts do not provide enough information to determine the thematic program with certainty. In the lowest zones are figures of monks, hermits, and holy warriors. The scenes of the Great Feasts are in the upper zones. The choice of figures from the nave reveals careful consideration. It seems that Metropolitan Longinus had a decisive role in designing the Krušedol program.<sup>44</sup>

A peculiar reverence of the Branković family of Srem was formed in Krušedol. Repeating the pattern of the Nemanjić family established by St. Sava at the beginning of the thirteenth century, Krušedol monks and Belgrade-Srem metropolitans vigorously promoted the Brankovićs and their projects. Krušedol became for Serbs in the sixteenth century what Studenica was in the Middle Ages. The sixteenth-century art and architecture of the South Slavs is therefore marked by a renewal of Christian Orthodox artistic values with some new additions. The development of arts in the Balkans from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries took different forms in relation to local circumstances, but all reveal pervasive Byzantine influence. The essence of art production over

the centuries, excluding minor artistic novelties and the specific demands of patrons, remained faithful to Christian Orthodoxy.

## Conclusions and Future Directions

The Balkans' geographic diversity and the complex history of the South Slavs in Southeastern Europe point to multifold artistic practices and vital connections with Mediterranean and European domains. During the later Middle Ages, religious art and architecture in this region demonstrated dynamic intersections between Byzantine, Latin, and Ottoman cultures. The artistic identity and presence evident in representative churches and monumental art, often founded by local rulers or religious leaders, was reinforced by intersections with specific territories, languages, and religions. In the Balkans and the Danube regions, Slavic languages were spoken or understood widely in medieval and modern Serbia, Croatia, Bulgaria, Bosnia, Hungary (especially in Transylvania), and portions of the territories today known as Romania (Wallachia and Moldavia), (North) Macedonia, and Montenegro. The majority of the South Slavs were Christians, both Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox. Following the dissolution of the Byzantine Empire in 1453, Ottoman policies increasingly restricted the erection or renewal of Christian places of worship, gradually enforced the conversion of churches to mosques, and additionally prompted massive relocations of Slavs and promoted their conversion to Islam. Yet, the divide between Christian and Islamic art and architecture deserves more nuanced understanding when set against material evidence, questions of patronage, and artistic solutions.

The ethnoreligious identities are frequently oversimplified and binary divisions, such as Roman Catholic/Orthodox, Christian/Muslim, and West European/East European, which are scholarly constructs used in the study of art and architecture in the vast territories of the Balkans and the lower Danube region, may be practical for categorizing works but are ultimately unsustainable and misleading.<sup>45</sup> Scholarly polarizations along confessional or sociopolitical lines obscure the multilayered realities of artistic works in terms of art practices, patronage, and ultimately, interpretation.



The cultural distinctions of art and architecture, presumably defined by the divide between West and East, have been suggested even before the seventeenth century and the politics of the Enlightenment. This divide paradoxically set the foundations of an early form of Orientalism, which led to multilayered “nesting Orientalism,” whereby everything, including art and architecture, in the “South” and “East” was considered primitive, raw, and irrational, the result of constant violence and socially unapproved behavior with pervasive negative connotations.<sup>46</sup> An example of Orientalism in the arts and architecture in the Balkans is the overarching historical narrative about the Serbian King Milutin and his immediate, multicultural family. King Milutin's architectural portfolio included patronage of both religious and secular establishments. He presumably founded and funded the building and renewal of no less than forty churches and monasteries within and outside Serbian domains, twenty-two of them identified today.<sup>47</sup> His other projects included many military fortifications and a hospital in Constantinople, which became a medical school.<sup>48</sup> Yet, already in the fourteenth century, King Milutin's contemporary, Dante Alighieri, records him as a plagiarist and counterfeiter and places him in the Inferno in the *Divine Comedy*.<sup>49</sup>

Following large-scale migrations toward the northern Balkans in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the South Slavs, who identified or were identified as such even if they were ethnically or religiously different groups of people (namely, the Serbs, Bulgarians, Arbanas [Albanians], Vlachs, Wallachians and Moldavians [Romanians], and even Hellenized Jews and converts to Christianity), emerged as a multilayered identity, defined by the Eastern Christian Church and Byzantine tradition.<sup>50</sup> In that scholarly construct, guided by the attitude of “nesting Orientalism,” not only was the art and architecture of the Balkans and the South Slavs considered inferior to the rest of Europe but the Christian Orthodox art was also deemed inferior to Roman Catholic art, and Islamic art was seen as lesser than Christian art. Even the brief overview of monumental architecture and arts in the Balkans and the lower Danube regions between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries provided here challenges such denigrative narratives and demonstrates the necessity of seeking a more nuanced understanding of artistic space in this part of the world.

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# 4

## THE VISUAL CULTURE OF WALLACHIA BEFORE AND AFTER 1453

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### **Visual Culture and Visual Studies**

Art history saw in the last three decades a “cultural turn”<sup>1</sup> and a “global turn”<sup>2</sup> that put the discipline in the meeting place of various cultural traditions and practices, aiming at bridging the gap between esthetics, iconographic knowledge, and society. In this chapter, I aim to keep these broadened boundaries of the discipline and analyze visual culture in relation to social practices and connections. Since the most complex and qualitative architectural and artistic works are also often the best preserved visual products of the Middle Ages, this contribution deals mostly with elite productions. However, I analyze the visual products both stylistically, iconographically, and in terms of the production, circulation, reception, and intention of their wider social and ideological actors.

The Romanian Principalities are late actors on the medieval Balkan historical scene, but they survived as autonomous statal entities to all the Balkan states after 1453. The visual culture of Wallachia pre- and post-1453 is important to the study of art history and the culture of Eastern Europe since, together with Moldavia, it incorporates and continues the Byzantine artistic and cultural traditions of southeastern Europe in an original manner after the conquest of Byzantium and of the Balkan states by the Ottoman power. Studying Wallachian visual culture reveals how Byzantine forms and ideas were perceived, cherished, and cultivated by its emerging neighbor before and after the empire's demise but also how these forms and ideas changed and evolved with time and under different general contexts.

### **The Wallachian People and Their Culture before 1200**

The archeological and documentary information on the periods before the formation of the medieval state in Wallachia (in 1330) is scarce. It speaks of the existence of a few voivodships (from Old Slavonic *vojvoda*, meaning military leader, warlord) and *banates* (from Old Slavonic *ban*, meaning duke) in the lower mountain areas of the Carpathians, ruled by voivodes, knezes (knez, O.Sl. prince) or *bans* of local or foreign (Cuman) descent between the ninth and thirteenth centuries. They were vassal territories located between the southern outer part of the Carpathian arc and the Danube, taking part in the Hungarian defense system of vassal states, counties, and cities, together with the citadels of the Teutons, the Szeklers, and the Saxons, who settled in the inner and outer skirts of the southern and eastern parts of the Carpathians. All of them served the Hungarian Kingdom as a buffer on its eastern flank against invasion and the Byzantine Empire. The local population, composed of Romanized Dacians together with Slavs, Goths, and other successive groups of migrants, merged into a quasi-homogenous ethnic unit that shared a Vulgar Late Latin evolved into the proto-Romanian language between the tenth and twelfth centuries. This ethnic group was named by Byzantines, Slavs, and Westerns as Vlachs or Wallachians (from Proto-Germanic *walhaz*, meaning non-Germanic foreigner, Celt, later Roman).<sup>3</sup> This was in the Middle Ages the common foreign ethnonym for what became the present-day Romanian people.



These populations had been progressively Christianized at least from the time of the Roman occupation (106–274 CE). Information mainly coming from material culture shows that the Christian faith started to permeate the local populations between the fourth and sixth centuries. This was better documented for the southeastern zone of Scythia Minor, that is, the shore of the Black Sea and the Danube areas. The lands at the Danube had hierarchical seats dependent on Rome (Dacia Ripensis, part of the prefecture of Illyricum) and Constantinople (Scythia Minor, part of the diocese of Thrace). They developed architecture and material culture of the early Byzantine style, especially in the Greek colonies on the seashore. Much of this cultural background, however, was lost during the sixth and seventh centuries due to the successive Avar, Slav, and Bulgar invasions.<sup>4</sup>

### **Byzantium and Catholic Missionaries**

During the reigns of Emperors John Tzimiskes (969–76) and Basil II (976–1025), when the Danube River fell within Byzantine *limes* (borders) again (1018) and the province of Paristrion was created, the inland populations and their Church organization became dependent on Byzantine administration.<sup>5</sup> The twelfth and thirteenth centuries saw subsequent disruptions. Byzantine rule was destabilized by the Cuman hegemony and the Tatar invasion in these territories, with the Paristrion disbanded. Further factors included the fall of Constantinople to the Crusaders, the dominance in the region of the Second Bulgarian Empire, the Catholic baptism of the Cumans in southern Moldavia in 1227, the strategic colonization by the Hungarian Kingdom via Catholic missionaries, and the consistent Cuman presence in the upper classes of these populations.<sup>6</sup> The Wallachian dependence on Ohrid, Turnovo, and Vidin, both politically and religiously, during the Second Bulgarian Empire (1185–1258) seemed to have been maintained throughout the period, at least at the Church level, if not also in the structures of political power. At their foundations, the Wallachian state in the 1330s and the first Orthodox metropolis in 1359 both chose to adopt Medio-Bulgarian as state chancellery and ritual Church language, respectively. This happened despite the Romanian language of the

population and despite the direct connections between Wallachia and Byzantium and the Greek cultural background of its first metropolitans.

## Visual Culture and Wallachian State Formation

After winning the battle of Posada in 1330, the Wallachian state formed by breaking from the suzerainty of the Hungarian Kingdom and entering the system of Byzantine political satellites. At this time, higher culture first began to flourish, financed by the state ruler and generated by the Church through its leading institutions—the Byzantine metropolis and the newly established Orthodox cenobitic monasteries. While there are vestiges of small local Orthodox court churches dating from the thirteenth century at Cetățeni (a triconch preceded by a longitudinal small church), Turnu-Severin (a court church with a simple longitudinal plan) and Curtea de Argeș (a court church with a Greek-cross plan), the first larger and more elaborate monuments did not appear until the foundation of the Wallachian metropolis, bearing a symbolic quality of *monumentum princeps* (major monuments).<sup>7</sup>

Initially, these official monuments were not pure examples of Byzantine culture. The political relations with the Hungarian Kingdom, active until 1330 and lingering afterward through economic, military, and matrimonial alliances, had led to a relatively mixed culture, especially in border areas, like the town of Câmpulung, situated on a commercial route that tied Wallachia to Transylvania. The town, which had a powerful colony of Catholic Saxons ruled by a *comes* (count), became the residence of the first voivodes of the newly formed state of Wallachia, the Basarab family (probably of Cuman origin). The mid-fourteenth-century court church in Câmpulung, a large and imposing building, was a mixture of a Gothic basilica with three naves and a Byzantine cross-in-square church.<sup>8</sup> Originally it was built of hewn stone blocks. After it collapsed during an earthquake in 1628, the church suffered a radical reconstruction and repainting effort between 1635 and 1638 and between 1827 and 1831.

The next monument was the court church erected sometime before 1352 in the town of Curtea de Argeș.<sup>9</sup> The large cross-in-square building with one dome replaced a smaller cruciform church with a transversal

rectangular narthex, which had been the court church of a local vassal voivode that dated from the mid-thirteenth century. The new monument was built of alternate layers of river stone on beds of mortar and bricks, a masonry technique used in late Byzantine architecture in the province areas and in the Balkans.<sup>10</sup> It served as necropolis for the first Basarab rulers. The church was part of a court complex, enclosed by walls and the court residence on its south. Only the foundations of the court still exist today; it was a moderately sized building with cellars and one tall story with two or three rooms on a floor, which replaced the older thirteenth-century courthouse.

A graphite drawing on the northern wall in the naos at Curtea de Argeș, preserved in a plaster layer under the paintings, recorded the 1352 death of Voivode Basarab I, the first ruler of Wallachia (r. ca. 1310–52). The mural decoration with frescoes was completed, according to a fragmentary inscription, when Wallachia held dominion over Vidin, that is, either 1369 or between 1375 and 1376.<sup>11</sup> The murals were made by a team of painters employing the Byzantine Palaiologan style, and scholars emphasize connections with the paintings of Chora in Constantinople (1315–21) and the Holy Apostles in Thessaloniki (ca. 1330) ([Figure 4.1](#)).<sup>12</sup> The Greek inscriptions have linguistic particularities that indicate that the painters were not native Greek speakers, leading to the supposition that they came from Balkan locales like northern Macedonia.<sup>13</sup> The iconographic cycles painted in the church include the Communion of the Apostles and the Holy Tabernacle in the sanctuary; the childhood of Christ, miracles, parables, and the Passion cycle in the nave; and the Last Judgment, the life of Virgin, and the life of St. Nicholas in the narthex. The presence in the Deësis scene above the entrance, of a supposed portrait of Voivode Nicolae Alexandru (r. 1352–64) ([Figure 4.2](#)), the one who established the metropolis of Wallachia and was recognized by the patriarch as αὐτοκράτωρ and αὐθέντης, led several historians to consider that the court church in Curtea de Argeș had also fulfilled, temporarily, the role of metropolitan cathedral.<sup>14</sup>



*Figure 4.1* [St. Nicholas Princely Church in Curtea de Argeș, post 1369, naos, western wall: the Dormition of the Mother of God](#)

Source: Viorel Maxim.



[Figure 4.2 St. Nicholas Princely Church in Curtea de Argeș, post 1369, pronaos, eastern wall, Deësis scene with a supposed portrait of Voivode Nicolae Alexandru.](#)

Source: Elisabeta Negrău.

**Monastic Visual Culture and Balkan Models**

The next important step is taken with the arrival in Wallachia of monk Nicodim, a Greek-Serbian intellectual from the Athonite milieu. In the 1360s and 1370s, he sought support from the voievodes Vladislav I and Radu I to establish two monasteries on Wallachian land, at Vodița and Tismana.<sup>15</sup> They are the first recorded Orthodox cenobitic monasteries in the state. Information about Wallachian monks prior to this date indicates only the existence of idiorrhythmic monastic life linked to Hesychast centers in the Balkans, like Kilifarevo.<sup>16</sup> Such dwellings were recorded at Alunișu-Nucu (Buzău county) and Corbii de Piatră (Argeș county). Vodița monastery had two consecutive churches that are now lost.<sup>17</sup> They were built of local river stone and painted by monks. The Dormition of the Mother of God Monastery at Tismana, a much larger complex, was built of hewn stone and also contained a voivode apartment.<sup>18</sup> The churches of the two monasteries were built on a triconch plan with Serbian and Bulgarian particularities, like the pilasters on which the naos dome rested and the pastophoria taking the form of small semicircular apses.<sup>19</sup> Cotmeana Monastery came soon after, in the early 1380s, built on a triconch plan and made of bricks on thick beds of mortar. The cornices and the arches on the façades were bordered with multicolored ceramic discs, a type of decoration used throughout the Balkans, especially in Bulgaria (e.g., Nesebar). The triconch plan reappears at the *parekklesion* of the court residence in Târgoviște, erected in the late 1380s and 1390s, cementing its role as the basic church plan in Wallachia, although its presence on Wallachian land is much older.<sup>20</sup> The Athonite type of triconch—a combination of a triconch and a cross-in-square church with a large *liti* (narthex)—is found around 1400 at Snagov Monastery.<sup>21</sup>

The voivode monastic patronage gained momentum between 1388 and 1391, with the erection and the decoration of the Holy Trinity Monastery at Cozia, built by Voievode Mircea I (r. 1386–1418). From the fourteenth-century phase of the monastic complex, only the church survives ([Figure 4.3](#)). It was built by Serbian masters from the sites of knez Lazar Hrebeljanović, on a triconch plan with the Serbian particularities of the four pilasters beneath the nave dome.<sup>22</sup> The monument shared conspicuous similarities with Serbian structures in the Morava valley, like Ravanica and Kalenić, in terms of construction technique and decoration. The horizontal

alternating bands of brick and mortar on the façades crossed by vertical colonettes, nervures, and pilasters; the sculpted rosettes in open work above the windows and doors; and the arches covered in entrelacs and bordered by embedded cruciform ceramic elements are common to all the three monuments. The Medio-Bulgarian linguistic particularities of the wall paintings' inscriptions point toward Turnovo as a likely former working site of the painters. However, the inscriptions' formation indicates close links to Constantinople, a fact proved by the use of the Synaxarion of Constantinople and the reference to the imperial ritual in the representation of the Akathistos Hymn but also by other visual and stylistic traits, such as the Hesychastic representations of uncreated light.<sup>23</sup> The iconographic program of the Cozia narthex (the sole part of the church that still preserves its original paintings) bears the themes of the Synaxarion, the Akathistos Hymn, the Ecumenical Councils, and the holy monks, and it became the paradigm of Wallachian church-painting programs for the narthex in subsequent centuries.



[Figure 4.3 Holy Trinity Church at Cozia Monastery, 1388–91, view from the east.](#)

Source: Dan Dinescu.

## **Eclectic Fashions and Decorative Arts**

The decorative arts of the period indicate a mix of traits linked to Byzantium, the Balkans, and Central Europe. Wallachian society had been deeply shaped by the ethnic, cultural, political, and economic contact with the neighboring areas, especially Transylvania and the Balkans. The artifacts of common use, like vessels, jewels, and clothing, reveal a mix of Central European, Balkan, and Byzantine fashion. The Transylvanian Saxon silver workshops were highly regarded, and the Church commissioned liturgical objects, like censers and chalices, from them. However, in the iconography and style of paintings, icons, liturgical embroideries, or book illumination, the Wallachian Church followed late Byzantine and the highest Balkan visual culture.<sup>24</sup>

The voivodes sought for political and matrimonial alliances in the neighboring states, forging familial relations with the king of Hungary, the tsar of Bulgaria, and the ruler of Serbia. The greatest voivode of the late fourteenth century, Mircea I, participated in the Crusade of Nicopolis in 1396, in a large European coalition comprising the Holy Roman Empire, Hungary, Poland, Bohemia, Croatia, Venice, Genoa, France, Burgundy, Aragon, Navarre, Bulgaria, and Byzantium. Mircea also received from the Hungarian Kingdom two duchies in southern Transylvania, the Amlaş and Făgăraş. As the votive and funeral portraits testify, the Wallachian voivodes dressed in short tunics and chausses and wore open crowns with fleurons. The tunics, despite being cut in a Western style, were made up of Byzantine textiles decorated with palmettes, circles, crosses, and double-headed eagles. Details on the tunics, like the decorative gilded bands applied on the sleeves and collars, were taken from the imperial Byzantine costume. The tunics were held by buckled belts of Central European manufacture and style.<sup>25</sup> However, the iconography of the portraits observed the Byzantine theology of power, showing the ruler, together with his wife, receiving their authority from Christ, who blesses them from Heaven.<sup>26</sup> Artifacts found in



graves reveal luxurious metalwork of Central European provenance together with textiles of southern manufacture, decorated in Byzantine styles, like the Gothic gold buckle and the Byzantine porphyry cap with pearls found in the voivode grave at Curtea de Argeș.<sup>27</sup> Royal wives dressed in long robes of a Byzantine cut made of Venetian brocade, and they wore open crowns with fleurons and white covers in the fashion of Hungarian queens. They added Balkan-made Byzantinizing jewelry similar to that of the Serbian queen Simonis.<sup>28</sup>

The sculptures on grave slabs show a similar oscillation: Gothic gisants next to lilies, geometrical rosettes, and the antique tree of life, with Byzantine palmettes and entrelacs. We are not fully aware of how the boyars and their wives dressed since no images of them survive, but the jewelry found in graves reveals the same mixture of Byzantine earrings and *prependoulia* (hanging ornaments) of Balkan manufacture with Roman cameos and Western-style rings decorated with fleur-de-lis.<sup>29</sup> The *Chronicon Pictum Vindobonense* (ca. 1358–73) shows a Wallachian messenger of Voivode Basarab dressed in a long coat similar to the Cuman caftans, tied with a Western belt and holding a Byzantine helmet.<sup>30</sup> Wallachians wore their hair long and wavy, as recorded in the illustrations of the *Chronicon Pictum*, which remained characteristic of Wallachian and Moldavian men's styles up to the late sixteenth century.<sup>31</sup>

### **Voievodes and Wallachian Culture before and after 1453**

The fifteenth century saw another political alliance with Hungary. Wallachia took part in the Varna Crusade of 1444 and in several other campaigns led by the king of Hungary against the Ottomans. After the last crusading voivodes—Vlad the Dragon (r. 1436–42; 1443–47) and Vlad the Impaler (r. 1456–62; 1476)—and following the fall of Byzantium, Wallachia entered a period of vassalage with the Ottoman Empire. The fifteenth century also faced the rise of powerful local boyars, who often challenged the succession to the throne of the ruling dynasty of the Basarabs, which itself split into two rival factions.

The turbulent mid-fifteenth century witnessed no more great cultural and artistic endeavors, and almost a hundred years passed after the erection of

the last great monuments at the end of the fourteenth century until conspicuous building activity resumed in Wallachia, toward the end of the fifteenth century. In the interim, only smaller foundations were built, which already by 1500 needed restoration or reconstruction.<sup>32</sup> The bellicose voivodes who were engaged in warfare and could not secure dynastic succession did not invest anymore in foundations or necropoleis. During these hostile times, smaller voivode residences were used at Bucharest and Târgșor in the 1450s. From the fifteenth century, which constituted the transition from the acculturation period of the fourteenth century, almost nothing has been preserved in terms of artistic production, making it difficult to trace how local arts evolved into higher levels of synthesis. It is evident, however, that the solid artistic tradition manifest at the beginning of the sixteenth century was the result of a successive filtering of Byzantine, Balkan, Central European, and Ottoman elements through the overlapping layers of an emerging local vision.

Amid this internally and externally destabilized political situation, a new vision was needed. This came when the last Serbian state, the Despotate of Smederevo, fell in 1456, generating an exodus of Serbian political elite, some of whom fled to neighboring Wallachia. By the 1480s, this influx of cultured and wealthy Serbians started to generate a growing influence at the level of the Wallachian court, under Voivode Vlad the Monk (r. 1481–95). He and his son and successor to the throne, Radu the Great (r. 1495–1508), assumed, following the inspiration of the noble Serbian refugees in the Wallachian state, the Byzantine model of royal patronage to a much greater extent than the crusading voivodes of the fifteenth century had.<sup>33</sup> Voivode Vlad the Monk focused on sustaining the Wallachian Church and foundations on Mount Athos, which he helped financially through the mediation of the Serbian princess Mara Branković (Despina Hatun).<sup>34</sup>

In the absence of real political strength to overcome Ottoman dominance in the region, the culture of the Church became the main priority for the voivodes and the means through which they sought to consolidate power. This program was continued by Vlad's son, Voivode Radu the Great, who was also an important donor to Mount Athos and built the Dealu Monastery, a great foundation in the capital town of Târgoviște. This new cultural vision, defined by historians as “Byzantium after Byzantium,” was

embodied in key new constructions, including Vlad's foundation and necropolis, Glavacioc Monastery (1487), situated not very far from the residence town of Bucharest; Bistrița Monastery (1491–92) and Govora Monastery (1495), both in the Subcarpathian County of Vâlcea; and Radu's large Dealu Monastery (1500).<sup>35</sup> As husband of the Montenegrin princess Katalina Crnojević, Radu managed to bring the printing press from Cetinje in Montenegro to Târgoviște and initiate a book-printing program in Wallachia, in Church Slavonic, only the second at that time in the Orthodox world. The Bistrița Monastery, which also harbored a large scriptorium of manuscripts, was the foundation of a powerful family of local boyars, the Craiovești, who would become central actors on the Wallachian political scene for the next two centuries, intermarrying with the Basarab dynasty and producing several rulers.

The first and foremost voivode from the Craiovești family was Neagoe Basarab (r. 1512–21). He continued and perfected the Byzantine model of cultural rulership initiated by Vlad the Monk and Radu the Great by striving to implement the spiritual symphony of Byzantine tradition between Church and state in Wallachia. For this, he focused on founding great monasteries to function as cultural and spiritual centers but also as symbols of Wallachian power and prestige in the Orthodox world. He was a great patron of the arts and did not neglect any of the visual aspects of power. In his youth, he entered into a close relationship with the former ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople, Niphon II, who stayed in Wallachia at the court of Radu the Great for several years, after his last deposition in 1502. Neagoe married Militsa Despina, a Serbian princess and daughter of a titular despot of Serbia, either Jovan Branković (r. 1493–1502) or his elder brother, Đorđe Branković (r. 1486–97), who, after becoming a monk by the name of Maxim, found refuge in Wallachia. From both Patriarch Niphon II and his Serbian in-laws, Neagoe likely learned many aspects of traditional Byzantine political theory and practice, which he later wrote down in a text titled *The Teachings of Neagoe Basarab to His Son Theodosie*, dedicated to his son and heir to the throne. Neagoe and his sons used to wear Byzantine *granatsai* and large open crowns with fleurons, while his wife, Militsa, and his daughters wore Wallachian-style garments with embroidered sleeves, open crowns with fleurons, and lavish Byzantine *prependoulia*.<sup>36</sup>

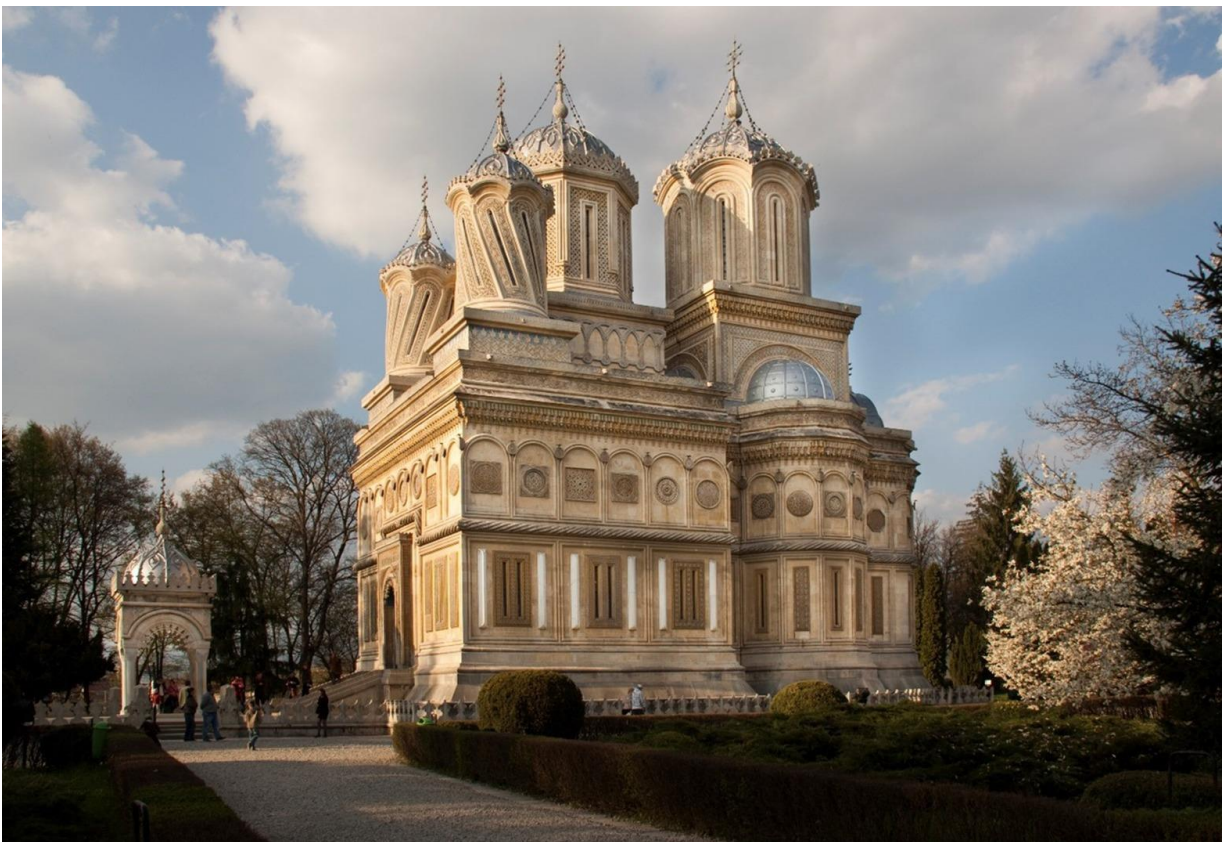
## Ottoman Hegemony and Fashion

The presence of the Ottomans became a major influence on the fashions of the region. By the end of the fifteenth century, kaftans replaced Western tunics, as shown by the votive representations of Radu the Great.<sup>37</sup> Ottoman fashion adopted by the Wallachian voivodes mirrored their political strategy, attempting to align with—rather than challenge—the new political hegemony in the region.

The most striking cases of adopting Ottoman visual models are the voivode monasteries of St. Nicholas (Dealu in Târgoviște) and of the Dormition of the Mother of God (in Curtea de Argeș), built at the beginning of the sixteenth century by mixed teams including master sculptors from Ottoman sites. Dealu was a large triconch church built from hewn stone and decorated on the façade with perfectly cut arcades and impeccable geometrical entrelacs and fleurons of Ottoman style, which bordered the domes and covered the entrance façade. The portal of the church is a typical Ottoman segmental arch made from alternately colored marble. The rosettes in open work are a Serbian element first seen at Cozia that probably survived in fifteenth-century architecture. Despite its mixture of foreign elements, Dealu proves that a solid local tradition of architecture was in place. The church has tall domes, which became characteristic for the architecture of Wallachia and Moldavia in the fifteenth century. Its façades are ordered by semicircular arches on two equal registers, a feature that would be subsequently adapted and maintained in the local church architecture. The ashlar technique, which has been used in Wallachia from the fourteenth century up to the beginning of the sixteenth century, achieved a high degree of quality at Dealu. Radu the Great also restored Tismana Monastery and rebuilt the domes on the church. They are octagonal and are placed upon “Turkish triangles,” which share the same influence from Ottoman architecture. This technique remained in use for domes in Wallachian church architecture up to the mid-seventeenth century.<sup>38</sup>

Probably the most important church built in the sixteenth century was the Dormition of the Mother of God Monastery at Curtea de Argeș, the foundation that Neagoe Basarab built between 1512 and 1517 ([Figure 4.4](#)). It encompassed the most Ottoman elements ever used in Wallachian architecture. The master builders and sculptors of Curtea de Argeș

Monastery were superior connoisseurs of Ottoman architectural techniques. Local records report that Neagoe asked Sultan Bayezid II for Ottoman stone and Ottoman builders to complete the project. Other local and Greek accounts recorded that the master builder was a Christian by the name of Manole of Niaesia (indicating either Nysia in Asia Minor or Nyssa in Cappadocia). But the team was mixed from a religious standpoint, a fact sustained by a stone found at the restoration of the monument, inscribed with the name of *Allah* in Arabic letters.<sup>39</sup>



[Figure 4.4 Dormition of Mother of God Monastery at Curtea de Argeș, 1512–17, southern view.](#)

Source: Alexandru Baboș.

The decorative motifs originating from the Islamic repertoire, in the form of stalactites (*muqarnas*), twisted ropes, and lily flowers, prove that the


craftspeople of Argeș Monastery likely came from the construction sites of the great cities of the Ottoman Empire. The sculptures on the façades contain Ottoman motifs painted in blue, turquoise, and golden ocher, the prevalent colors in the ceramic exterior decoration of the Timurid architecture, which the Timurid and the Tabrizi artisans, who came to the Ottoman Empire during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, brought to the capital of Istanbul.<sup>40</sup> Other elements of the rich repertoire of the Argeș sculptures come from the Byzantine tradition of sculpture and metalwork, taking the form of the various types of entrelacs of cords or palmettes that decorate the rosettes in open work, frieses, and arches.

### **Post-Byzantine Artistic Canon and Cretan Models**

The frescoes in the Argeș interior were completed after the death of the founder, in 1526, by his son-in-law, Voivode Radu of Afumați. Only thirty-seven fragments survive, following the restoration of the monument in the 1880s.<sup>41</sup> On the walls of the narthex, there was a gallery of dynastical and funerary portraits of Wallachian voivodes, which was sequentially completed between 1518 and the 1570s. The peripheral zone of the narthex, where the graves of the *ktetors* were located, was enclosed by pews topped by double-sided icons displaying warrior saints and holy monks. The visual sources for the votive iconography at Curtea de Argeș were the painting programs for mausolea developed by the Serbian kings, which established an iconographic relationship between the votive paintings and hagiographical, biblical, and liturgical cycles. The program of the church of the Curtea de Argeș Monastery illustrates a theology of the role of the Christian ruler in the economy of salvation, as the Serbian iconographic programs did in the past. The voivode portraits appear placed in the continuation of the Menologium and the Ecumenical Councils, following the Serbian model (as seen at Staro Nagoričane and Dečani).<sup>42</sup>

The main painter of the ensemble, Dobromir by name, was arguably a Wallachian familiar with the Serbian art and the Cretan painters. His gracious and elegant figures, together with the rich coloring scheme, may be seen as marks of a Veneto-Cretan influence filtered through a highly qualitative late Byzantine painting tradition. The frescoes at Curtea de

Argeş should be analyzed in connection with the few double-sided icons preserved from the narthex and with the Pietà icon commissioned by Militsa Despina in 1522, which portrays Militsa mourning her dead young son, Theodosie ([Figure 4.5](#)).<sup>43</sup> The rich colors and gracious proportions of the figures recall fifteenth-century Cretan painters, like Angelos Akotantos. Dobromir and his team painted frescoes in the monasteries of Bistrița, Dealu, and Curtea de Argeş, as well as, most likely, some of the portable icons that still exist today.<sup>44</sup>

 A Painting with several figures flanking a central male figure being deposited from a cross

[Figure 4.5](#) Anonymous artist, Descent from the Cross/Pietà, 1522, with a portrait of Lady Militsa Despina holding her dead son Theodosie, egg tempera on wooden panel, 67.5 × 44 × 44.5 cm.

*Source:* National Museum of Art in Bucharest, inv. 11345/i2.

Under the rule of Neagoe, the arts were supported to develop under relatively stable conditions. His reign, dominated by a strong vision of continuing the Byzantine cultural model as he understood it, culminated in an unprecedented increase in artistic activity in Wallachia, following the shortcomings of the fifteenth century. He was also a great benefactor and founder at Mount Athos, Sinai, Jerusalem, and many other places in the Balkans. Neagoe's cultural program must be understood as an apogee in relation to the projects started under Vlad the Monk and Radu the Great and continued by Neagoe's successors, his sons-in-law and sons of Radu the Great, the voivodes Radu of Afumați (r. 1522–29) and Radu Paisie (r. 1535–45), who became caretakers of his foundations. The frescoes of the metropolitan church of Târgoviște (demolished in 1889), a grandiose cross-in-square church with eight domes built by Neagoe in 1518, were completed in 1537 by Voivode Radu Paisie. The latter also revived the older Byzantine iconography of the ruler crowned by angels, which glorified the divine origin of the ruler's power.<sup>45</sup>

## **Disruption of Medieval Political and Cultural Structures, 1550–1600**

After the mid-1550s, the economic and political situation slowly started to degrade. The state of vassalage toward the Ottoman Empire put heavy material burdens on Wallachia, and the fall of the Hungarian Kingdom in 1541 wiped out its main anti-Ottoman ally. Transylvania became an autonomous principality with Hungarian rule under Ottoman vassalage. The Wallachian voivodes sought to establish political contact with the remote Holy Roman Empire, which, however, was then more preoccupied with the confessional conflict between Catholics and Protestants than with crusading projects against the Ottoman Empire. The “chivalric” vision of the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Wallachian crusading voivodes and the “Byzantine” culture of the voivodes of the early sixteenth century were replaced by a more Eastern despotic manner of rule, likely due to the accepted suzerainty of the Ottoman Empire. At the same time, the Byzantine tradition and, from the 1570s on, the European monarchies both constituted sources of inspiration that shaped the political culture of Wallachia.<sup>46</sup> A “nobiliary regime” started to take over, with powerful families of boyars holding high positions in the Divan (the state council) and owning large latifundia.<sup>47</sup> They were also generous founders of churches and monasteries and used donations to consolidate their position in the power system pro or against the ruler.<sup>48</sup> Such powerful boyars included the Buzești family, loyal military servants of Voivode Mihai Viteazul (Michael the Brave; r. 1593–1601).

In 1563, the frescoes of Snagov Monastery—a large Athonite triconch church originally founded by Mircea I and rebuilt by Neagoe in the early sixteenth century—were completed by Voivode Petru the Younger, son of the despotic Voivode Mircea Ciobanul (Mircea the Shepherd) and of Lady Chiajna, a niece of Lady Militsa Despina Branković, the wife of Neagoe Basarab. In 1564, the frescoes of Tismana Monastery were completed with the donations of a grand boyar, Logothete Nedelco Bălăceanu, and with the support of Lady Chiajna. Both monuments were painted by the same team of artists, led by Dobromir the Younger (not to be confused with Dobromir, the painter of Curtea de Argeș Monastery). The frescoes are the last



preserved examples of the high-quality post-Palaiologan tradition in Wallachia.<sup>49</sup>

As the economic situation in the Balkans deteriorated, many Greek, Macedonian, Bulgarian, Aromanian, and Albanian merchants and craftspeople came to Wallachia, bringing with them provincial art forms that were more accessible financially but also less sophisticated. They started to influence local art and were eventually patronized by the voivodes and boyars as well as by the common folk. One example is the frescoes of Bucovăț Monastery, created by Greek painters of Kastorian origin in 1574 and around 1589, a commission of Voivode Alexandru II Mircea; his wife, Ecaterina Salvaresso (a Genoese from Pera in Constantinople); and two local boyars.<sup>50</sup> Other examples include the frescoes by Menas, a Greek Macedonian painter, in Căluș Monastery, a foundation of the Buzești family in 1594, and possibly also in the princely church in Târgoviște. The painter also served as diplomat for Voivode Michael the Brave. These artists introduced a new esthetic, with thin and attenuated figures and less monumental proportions for the scenes and silhouettes, changing dramatically the post-Palaiologan classical style that had dominated painting in Wallachia.

## Conclusion

The sixteenth century was a time of disruption for many of the Byzantine traditions that shaped art in Wallachia. There were significant progressive transformations to adapt to the new geopolitical and cultural realities of the time, in which Ottoman dominance was challenged in the Mediterranean in the aftermath of the battle of Lepanto in 1571. Greek Constantinopolitans from Phanar began to come to Wallachia, taking up roles as dignitaries of state and marrying into the voivode family. They formed an increasingly powerful party, which would play a leading political role in the next centuries. New ideas emerged. One example is the political project of Voivode Mihai Viteazul to unite Wallachia, Moldavia, and Transylvania into a single great state, which succeeded for a short time in 1600. Such interactions also meant a wider circulation of craftspeople between the three provinces and a more free process of Balkan immigration since the new

state was intended to fulfill a leading role in the region. Even though the union did not last, the idea contributed to an increase in political and cultural collaboration between the three Danubian principalities in the next century.

Research on the art of medieval Wallachia became more focused on iconography after the fall of the Communist regime in Romania. This turn to iconographic studies is an important and ongoing development; many monuments still need study, especially regarding the identification of their textual and visual sources. Archeological research, restoration, and the inventorying of paintings and inscriptions need to continue in order to enable us to study the visual culture of the Wallachian Middle Ages in greater depth. Another important avenue of research regards the social and cultural connections of the Wallachian people, a field that has grown constantly in the last 50 years. More research is needed to discover the extent of these interactions—especially to trace the Wallachian artistic and cultural impact in other areas. These horizontal investigations would contribute to clarifying in more depth vertical issues, like the originality of the Wallachian art and culture.

## Notes

1. [See Ian Hunter, “Cultural Studies,” in \*Encyclopedia of Aesthetics\*, ed. Michael Kelly \(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998\), <http://oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t234/e0143>.](#)
2. [See, for example, Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Catherine Dossin, and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, eds. \*Circulations in the Global History of Art\* \(London: Routledge, 2016\).](#)
3. [Encyclopedia Britannica, s.v. “Vlah,” by Victor A. Friedman; accessed 18 January 2023; <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Vlach>.](#)
4. [Răzvan Theodorescu, \*Un mileniu de artă la Dunărea de Jos, 400–1400\* \[A millennium of art at the Lower Danube, 400–1400\] \(București: Editura Gramar, 2002\), 11–38; Georgi Atanassov, “Christianity along the Roman Danube Limes in the Roman Provinces of Dacia Ripensis, Moesia Secunda, and Scythia Minor \(4th–6th C. AD\),” in \*The Lower Danube Roman Limes \(1st-6th C. AD\)\*, eds. L.](#)

- [Vagalinski, N. Sharankov, and S. Torbatov \(Sofia: NIAM-BAS, 2012\), 327–80.](#)
5. [R. Theodorescu, \*Bizanț, Balcani, Occident la începuturile culturii medievale românești \(secolele X–XIV\)\* \[Byzantium, the Balkans, and the West at the beginnings of Romanian medieval culture, tenth to fourteenth centuries\] \(Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 1974\), 45–129.](#)
  6. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, 162–95.](#)
  7. [R. Theodorescu, “\*Monumentum princeps și geneze statale medievale în Europa răsăriteană\*” \[Monumentum Princeps and medieval statal geneses in Eastern Europe\], in \*Itinerarii medievale\* \[Medieval itineraries\] \(Bucharest: Editura Meridiane, 1979\), 8–36, at 28–30.](#)
  8. [Cristian Moisescu, “Noi puncte de vedere asupra ipostazelor dispărutei biserici domnești din Câmpulung-Muscel” \[New viewpoints on the disappeared court church in Câmpulung-Muscel\], \*Revista Monumentelor Istorice\* 47, nos. 1–2 \(1998\): 56–61.](#)
  9. [Carmen-Laura Dumitrescu, “Anciennes et nouvelles hypothèses sur un monument roumain de XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle: L’église Saint Nicolae Domnesc de Curtea de Argeș,” \*Revue Roumaine d’Histoire de l’Art\* 16 \(1979\): 3–63; on its dating, see 11–16.](#)
  10. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, 3–11.](#)
  11. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, 18–23; Carmen-Laura Dumitrescu, “Le voïévode donateur de la fresque de Saint-Nicolae Domnesc \(Argeș\) et le problème de sa domination sur Vidin au XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle,” \*Revue des Etudes Sud-Est Européenes\* 17, no. 3 \(1979\): 541–58.](#)
  12. [Dumitrescu, “Anciennes et nouvelles hypothèses,” 47–57; Draginja Simić-Lazar, “Observations sur le raport entre les décors de Kalenić, de Kahrié Djami et de Curtea de Argeș,” \*Cahiers Archéologiques\* 34 \(1986\): 143–60.](#)
  13. [Petre P. Panaitescu, “Inscripțiile religioase grecești de la Biserica Domnească” \[Religious Greek inscriptions at the princely church\], \*Buletinul Comisiunii Monumentelor Istorice\*, 10–16 \(1917–23\), 161–71, at 170; Virgil Vătășianu, \*Istoria artei feudale în Țările Române\* \[History of feudal art in Romanian principalities\] \(Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 1959\), 389.](#)

14. [Pavel Chihaia, “Despre Biserica Domnească din Curtea de Argeș și confesiunea primilor voievozi ai Țării Românești” \[On the princely church at Curtea de Argeș and the religious confession of the first voivodes of Wallachia\], in \*Artă medievală\* \[Medieval Art\], vol. 1, \*Monumente din cetățile de scaun ale Țării Românești\* \[Monuments in the court citadels of Wallachia\] \(Bucharest: Editura Albatros, 1998\), 36–55, at 43.](#)
15. [R. Theodorescu, “Curenți și doctrine sud-dunărene în cultura românească a secolelor XIII–XIV” \[South-Danubian trends and doctrines in Romanian culture of the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries\], in \*Itinerarii medievale\*, 223–66.](#)
16. [Theodorescu, \*Bizanț, Balcani, Occident\*, 203.](#)
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# 5

## MOLDAVIAN VISUAL CULTURE BEFORE AND AFTER 1453

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On the eastern side of the Carpathians, extending toward the Black Sea along the valley of the Dniester River and toward the Danube along the valleys of Prut and Siret rivers, Moldavia (northeastern modern Romania and the Republic of Moldova) emerged as an autonomous political entity in the mid-fourteenth century. A few decades later, it entered the ecclesiastical network of Byzantium through a complicated negotiation with the ecumenical patriarchate, concluded around 1400. The fall of Constantinople in 1453 had minimal impact on this territory, situated at a safe distance from the Ottoman force. However, the traditional distinction between a proper late Byzantine and a post-Byzantine cultural interval, separated by the fall of Constantinople, seems to have shaped local cultural production. The visual culture of Moldavia could therefore be split between a true late Byzantine period (when artistic traditions of the imperial capital and of the Balkan states were integrated into local practices) and the period after 1453 (when Byzantine traditions were altered through local formulas within the



broader heading of so-called post-Byzantine art, a problematic concept that still begs for a clear definition).<sup>1</sup>

This chapter aims at highlighting the milestones of the political history of the Moldavian state throughout the period that most visibly maintains the artistic tradition of Byzantium and presenting the main traits of its artistic production, referring to key monuments and works of art. I shall henceforth briefly summarize the canonical interpretations proposed by traditional scholarship and indicate the main lines of the criticism that shaped the recent approaches to this heritage. I propose that an apt reading of Moldavian visual culture as part of the broader post-Byzantine phenomenon should rely on the methodological framework elucidated by the concepts of hybridity and eclecticism.<sup>2</sup> In this sense, Moldavian visual culture displays a programmatic effort to preserve the Byzantine imprint, generating formulas that intersect this heritage with alternative sources, transmitted along various networks of artistic and cultural interchange.

### **Political and Artistic Developments (Fourteenth to Sixteenth Centuries)**

In the second half of the fourteenth century, the Kingdoms of Poland and Hungary joined their efforts to push away the control exercised by the diminishing Tartar force over the area between the Carpathians and the Black Sea.<sup>3</sup> As a result, after 1340, discrete state formations emerged between the mountains and Dniester River. Among them, Moldavia grew strong enough to subject its neighboring rivals and create the *voivodate* (principality) of Moldavia, under the suzerainty of the Hungarian Crown.<sup>4</sup> At the beginning, a ruler from the trans-Carpathian voivodate of Maramureş (Máramaros, Marmatia), Dragoş (r. ca. 1347–54), established a mark across the mountains as vassal of the King of Hungary, Louis I of Anjou (r. 1339–84). But in 1364–65, Bogdan of Cuhea (r. ca. 1363–67), a member of a rival family, crossed the mountains in plain rebellion against the Hungarian Crown and conquered the realm of Moldavia. His son Laţcu (r. ca. 1369–77) reached out to the papacy in Avignon for legitimization of his reign, obtaining from Urban V (in office 1362–70) the title of *dux* and the establishment of a Latin bishopric in his primary city, Siret.<sup>5</sup> Little evidence

survives indicating the artistic initiatives of this early stage of Moldavian culture. Archeologists have argued that in this initial period, architecture was still mostly based on wooden structures, and its civil and religious furnishings are largely lost. The archeological investigations carried out in Maramureș at the residence of Bogdan in Cuhea might offer a comparative glimpse. They uncovered a simple residence and a small monastic settlement, lacking any significant artistic evidence.<sup>6</sup>

The dynastic crisis that ensued in the Hungarian Kingdom after the death of Louis I in 1382 paved the way for a consolidation of the Moldavian state as an autonomous political unit. A crucial role was played by Peter Mușat (r. ca. 1378–92), who established in 1387 an alliance with the new dominant power in the area, the Polish-Lithuanian Union. The growth of Moldavia and its ascendance as a local power was accomplished at the end of the fourteenth century, when Roman I (r. 1392–94) managed to set his authority upon the formerly autonomous southern areas (which were called the Lower Realm, in contrast with the Upper Realm to the north) and upon the adjacent Black Sea shore. This direct contact with critical points of the commercial network developed by the Genoese Republic across the Black Sea dramatically enriched the prosperity of Moldavia and empowered it as a regulator of the main route between Central Europe, the Baltic Sea, and the Black Sea.<sup>7</sup> This was the propitious context for the long and fruitful reign of Alexander “the Good” (r. 1400–32), who consolidated the military force of Moldavia and strengthened its collaboration with the Polish-Lithuanian Union through strategic treaties signed in 1402, 1404, 1407, 1411, and 1415 with King Władysław II Jagiełło and through matrimonial policy, as I discuss later in this chapter. The Byzantine imprint upon the local culture gained a strong impetus under his rule and featured as part of the later grounding mythology of the seventeenth-century claim to autocephaly put forth by the Moldavian Church.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, Alexander is the first Moldavian ruler whose portrayal survives, unmistakably displaying features of late Byzantine courtly fashion and the epithet of *autokrator*, adopted already by his predecessor, Roman I.<sup>9</sup> His patronage of artistic production established a tradition that would serve as a model for all his successors.

In architecture, the last decade of the fourteenth century is marked by two extant religious buildings, the triconch church from Siret, dedicated to the

Holy Trinity, and the funeral chapel from Rădăuți, dedicated to Saint Nicholas. They display the multiplicity of traditions, as the Trinity church is a typical triconch structure, while St. Nicholas seems to replicate Central European local practices, with a higher nave adjoined by two aisles that suggest a row of chapels fulfilling the funeral function of the edifice.<sup>10</sup> Each of the three bays of the aisles is vaulted with a barrel disposed perpendicularly on the nave, while low-rising arches interconnect these pronounced independent areas of the necropolis. Besides these two monuments, the material evidence from the period before 1400 is very limited. In fact, the reign of Alexander the Good is nowadays illustrated mainly by sumptuary arts (liturgical embroideries and manuscript production), as his many architectural initiatives were refashioned in later stages. Documentary evidence signals that monumental painting flourished equally under his patronage; however, there are regrettably no preserved traces.<sup>11</sup> Recent scholarship explores the hypothesis that the peculiar artistic formulas of Moldavian art were initiated during Alexander's reign. His patronage reflects direct artistic links with Constantinople, epitomized in the spectacular processional icon from Neamț Monastery and exchanges with South Slavic traditions.<sup>12</sup>

Alexander's death pushed the realm in a dramatic period of turmoil, brought to end only at the seizure of the throne by Stephen III the Great (r. 1457–1504), undoubtedly the pivotal figure in the history of Moldavia. Excellent research into Stephen and the transformation of his life into a national myth by local historiography was recently undertaken by Jonathan Eagles.<sup>13</sup> The long and eventful reign of Stephen marked indeed the zenith of Moldavia: state administration achieved a high level of performance, Moldavia became a military force to be reckoned with, and its strategic alliances culminated in an involvement into a Crusade project, alongside Venice and Hungary.<sup>14</sup> However, the significant interval of Stephen's reign comes only after his accommodation of the Ottomans through the reinstatement of the annual tribute (*haraç*) in 1487–89 and the acceptance of the empire's control of the Black Sea shore. Avoiding an oversimplifying and reductionist post hoc ergo propter hoc reasoning, one should nonetheless stress that, in the two decades that follow this peace treaty, artistic production gained an unprecedented impetus in Moldavia.<sup>15</sup>

The earlier stage of Stephen's reign was linked, in fact, mainly to the upgrade of existing military strongholds according to the requirements of modern warfare, with sensible enlargements and the conversion, if necessary, from wooden structures to masonry. The founding of Putna Monastery in 1466 represents the main artistic project of his reign, as it was meant to become the mausoleum of the ruler. It marked a milestone for Moldavian architecture, establishing a model that was later emulated by monastic churches erected by the local dynasts. Largely lost due to a general renovation in the seventeenth century, the original appearance of Putna can be glimpsed, as in a mirror, through the mediation of Neamț Monastery, built in 1498, which became a blueprint for later large *katholika* ([Figure 5.1](#)).<sup>16</sup>



[Figure 5.1](#) Neamț Monastery, Church of the Ascension of Christ, 1497.

Source: Vlad Bedros.

Several key features of religious architecture are evident in Neamț and in the simpler churches commissioned toward the turn of the century. Their building principles and decorative strategies echo late Gothic traditions, with elongated plans, soaring inner spaces, and fragmented roofs, while their façades are marked by buttresses and their openings adorned with lavish carved-stone frameworks. Color plays an important role in the general aspect of the exterior, which is punctuated with glazed ceramic elements: courses and vertical strips of colored bricks, three courses of glazed discs under the cornice, and sparse accents framing the openings that make use of the same polychrome materials. This is a highly eclectic decorative strategy that combines building traditions from late Byzantium with those of the Polish-Lithuanian Union.<sup>17</sup> A peculiar vaulting system, with unknown and still debated origins, crowns the main bays of the inner spaces, with a row of diagonal arches projecting as a lozenge-in-square structure above the main arcs, reducing therefore the diameter of the supported domes and dramatically enhancing the ascending accent of the tall and narrow interiors.<sup>18</sup> The traditional labeling of these edifices as works of Byzantine tradition built with Gothic craftsmanship and partially respecting Gothic principles, though open to criticism and necessary clarifications, still holds true.<sup>19</sup>

Stephen the Great also supported the production of wall paintings as commissioner of the earliest preserved examples of this art in Moldavia. Earlier scholarship has already pointed out similarities between these frescoes and the works of itinerant workshops from the Central Balkans after the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople.<sup>20</sup> The variety of styles hints at an eclectic milieu, with several leading masters that frequently collaborate in various permutations to fulfill commissions from the ruler or from the main potentates. Their art incorporates elements whose origins were already traced to the so-called Ohrid school but also those with a diffuse Gothic flavor, encountered especially in the wall paintings from Neamț.<sup>21</sup> Their exceptional qualities are also grounded by iconography. Moldavian programs display rare and theologically dense themes and motifs, which sparked an interest in reconstructing the relation between the production of wall painting and the broader cultural milieu. Further inquiry should evaluate the requirements set forth by the literati in charge of

generating the iconographic programs and the reception of their messages by a mostly monastic audience. Investigating the text-image relationship by cautiously surveying the written heritage of the interval period should stand at the core of such inquiries into the artistic production of this highly creative period.

The last decades of the reign of Stephen III were also crucial for the intensification of sumptuary artistic production, especially through the activity of the embroidery workshop from Putna Monastery and through the flourishing of religious scriptoria in the monasteries of Neamț, Bistrița, and Putna. The late fifteenth century is marked, however, by a surprising absence of icons, except for an exceptional set of full-figure Apostles and festal icons, bearing strong Muscovite expression but certainly of local manufacture.<sup>22</sup> Their presence highlights the strength of the Moldavian links with East Slavic culture through matrimonial alliances mentioned later in this chapter. The abundance of liturgical veils might suggest, on the other hand, their use as curtains for low templon-style chancel barriers, in the absence of icons fitted for proper iconostases ([Figure 5.2](#)).<sup>23</sup>



[Figure 5.2 Crucifixion of Christ embroidery, 1500, Putna Monastery.](#)

Source: Putna Monastery.

Unfortunately, most of the civil art linked with the court and the residences of the social elites is lost, leaving archeologists with the task of reconstructing the presumed lavishness of the everyday life of the potentates. Among the most frequent and spectacular findings, one must mention the abundance of Gothic stove tiles that bear an iconography that testifies to a courtly milieu of Central European fashion.<sup>24</sup> Surprisingly, this fashion extends to the realm of church decoration, through motifs, such as

the manticore, the mermaid, and the heraldic lion, that sometimes appear also on the ceramic disks adorning the façades.

After another interval of scarce artistic activity during the reigns of Bogdan III (r. 1504–17) and Stephen IV (r. 1517–27), patronage intensified again during the rule of Peter IV Rareș (r. 1527–38, 1541–46). His two periods on the throne were separated by an Ottoman campaign in Moldavia that ended with the capture of Suceava and the seizing of the state treasury in 1538. After the dramatic ending of his first rule, in which he tried to emulate the military ambitions of his father, Stephen III, Peter managed to regain the favor of the Ottomans. But this shift clearly outlines the changed geopolitical realities: Moldavia lacked alternatives to its status as an autonomous territory indirectly controlled by the sultan, who confirmed the local ruler, assimilating him into the administrative elite of the empire.<sup>25</sup> This reality would practically define the local historical processes until modern times. As for the history of art, the sixteenth century displays, after the patronage of Peter Rareș, only episodic evidence of artistic production, with a renewed increase at the end of the century and in the first decade of the following one. However, this late interval, defined by the patronage of the Movilă (Moghilă, Mohyla) family that managed to seize the throne in 1595, hardly shows continuity with former tradition and bears a strong imprint of the popularity of Russian models.<sup>26</sup> In many ways, as early as 1550, Moldavia seems to have entered a new artistic cycle, retaining only vestiges of its former visual traditions.

If architecture evolved, in this long interval of the sixteenth century, within the general guidelines set at the end of the fifteenth century, combining the Gothic style of carved-stone decoration with Renaissance elements through the mediation of the Transylvanian workshops that fulfilled these commissions, the wall paintings departed more clearly from earlier tradition.<sup>27</sup> In the former Metropolitan church of Suceava, dedicated to Saint George, the patronage of Peter IV Rareș sponsored a spectacular ensemble of wall painting, marked by iconographic and stylistic features that echo pictorial practices from the Balkans. They are showcased in the majestic procession of the Celestial Liturgy at the base of the drum in the naos and in the magnificent icons of military saints in courtly garments,



wearing extravagant headgear, which are consistent with the stylistic approach of the so-called Ohrid school ([Figure 5.3](#)).



[Figure 5.3](#) [Monastery of St. John the Neomartyr \(former Metropolitan church of Suceava\), Church of St. George, built in 1522, naos, SS George and Demetrius, mural painting, post 1532.](#)

*Source:* Vlad Bedros.

In both iconography and style, sixteenth-century Moldavian production displays stronger connections with the post-Byzantine Balkans, through the artistic initiatives of Peter IV Rareș and his successor, Alexander of Lăpușna (r. 1552–61, 1564–68), epitomized in the fragmentary wall paintings preserved from the katholikon of Râșca Monastery, painted in 1554 by Stamatello Kotronas from the island of Zakynthos. This dialogue with the Balkans was later replaced by an orientation toward East Slavic sources. Around 1600, in the katholikon of Sucevița Monastery dedicated to

the Resurrection, the main artistic initiative of the Movilă family, the traditional iconography of the naos was replaced with new themes, mostly cryptic hymnographic and sophianic images of Russian fashion, such as the “Only Begotten Son” or the iconic depiction of the Divine Wisdom.<sup>28</sup>

Icon painting represents an artistic practice that gained currency in the sixteenth century, with a consistent and stylistically diverse corpus. However, the central issue for the history of image production in this interval remains the proliferation of the exterior painting that covers the façades of several monastic churches and private chapels, spanning from the apse to the western façade and from the base to the cornice ([Figure 5.4](#)).<sup>29</sup>



[Figure 5.4](#) [Moldovița Monastery, Church of the Annunciation, built in 1532, south façade, 1537.](#)

Source: Vlad Bedros.

Much attention was paid to the possible interpretation of these façade images and to the possible initiator of such a peculiar practice. Most probably, the decorative program was meant to enhance the spiritual contemplation of the monastic communities and was structured along the liturgical milestones of Lent. It therefore includes the parable of the prodigal son (the beginning of the Triodion), the Last Judgment (the Sunday of *Apokreo*), the days of Creation culminating with the Original Sin (the Sunday of *Tyrophages*), and the Akathistos hymn (the fifth Saturday of Lent). On the apses, a glorious gathering of saints from every category, disposed in tiers that are correlated with specific hypostases of the divine on the eastern axis, evoke the Sunday of All Saints, the triumphant conclusion of the symmetrical interval of the Church calendar, the Pentekostarion. This core of spiritual meditation on the mysteries of divine *oekonomia* is orchestrated by an apology of Christ's Incarnation (the Tree of Jesse) and by a plethora of hagiographic exempla. The monastic imprint is best epitomized by the rare but spectacular depiction of John Climacus's Spiritual Ladder at Râșca and at Sucevița. The Siege of Constantinople, illustrated under the Akathistos hymn, was refashioned to depict the Ottoman instead of the Persian army and encouraged a contextual interpretation centered on the political Crusader ambitions of Peter Rareș, who was traditionally seen as the main commissioner of these programs.<sup>30</sup> One should nonetheless accommodate the ruler's agency with the proper reception of these images by their audience, the monastic communities from the main spiritual centers of the realm.

Traces of insular exterior frescoes were recovered by archeologists in earlier monuments, inviting the possibility of a prior stage of development for this practice. On the other hand, the strategic expansion of this iconographic program with its stable core of themes represents a marked peculiarity of sixteenth-century Moldavian art.

### **Agents and Premises for Cultural Transmissions**

The brief survey proposed in the previous section followed the traditional logic of the grand narrative, prioritizing a direct correspondence between artistic and political histories. The latter could however prove to be an

overrated explanatory framework for the artistic realities. The usual reasoning, claiming that “strong” leaders would naturally be munificent patrons or that prosperous intervals immediately nurture artistic excellency, represents an approach that is both naïve and simplistic.<sup>31</sup> Stephen III, in his most authoritarian interval, was not the generous commissioner of art that he became in his final years. The mere gain of control upon the commercial route to the Black Sea did not immediately generate spectacular artistic developments. Another agency should henceforth be considered, as it was more efficient in kick-starting the commission of artistic products and in imposing the late Byzantine model: the institutions of the Church.

As I mentioned earlier, Peter Mușat was instrumental in promoting the local Eastern Christian Church, arguably searching for a source of legitimation in line with the supposedly dominant Eastern Christian confession of his subjects. After a complicated negotiation with Constantinople, opened in an unknown date between 1381 and 1386, a metropolitan see was established in Suceava in 1401.<sup>32</sup> Simultaneously, monastic life was reformed in agreement with late Byzantine practices, under the patronage of the ruler and of the local potentates, with Neamț, Bistrița, Moldovița, and Probota as its main centers. These intransigent anti-Latin communities were at the forefront of a stubborn opposition to the Union with Rome, proclaimed at the Council of Ferrara-Florence (1431–9), at which Moldavia was represented by the metropolitan Damian, an important member of the pro-Union party.<sup>33</sup> In the official historiography, it became a commonplace to consider that, due to this traumatic event, Moldavia became an autocephalous church, but challenges to this hypothesis have nonetheless been raised more recently.<sup>34</sup>

One must, however, ponder whether the dispute around the ecclesiastical dependency of Moldavia bears much meaning for the discussion of its artistic production. The Moldavian milieu was surely defined by a highly polemical tenet, and many preserved manuscripts from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries contain theological works addressing heresy. This indicates a general awareness in terms of confessional purity and a typically late Byzantine reduction of modern disputes to already dismissed heresies, most frequently Arianism and Iconoclasm.<sup>35</sup> In fact, this perspective would only bring the Moldavian monasteries closer to the Great Church, when

Gennadios I Scholarios (in office 1454–64) became patriarch of Constantinople through the direct intervention of Sultan Mehmet II the Conqueror (r. 1444–46, 1451–81). From this position of utmost authority, Gennadios voiced his personal agenda of opposing the Union, thus reinstating the ecumenical patriarchate as the center of resistance against any possible religious compromise.<sup>36</sup>

The monasteries patronized by Moldavian rulers or by representatives of the social elite were, in fact, participating in a broader spiritual network shaped by monastic practices of late Byzantium, with Mount Athos at its core. A case study in the cultural transfer operated through this network could be the figure of the metropolitan Theoctist I (in office ca. 1453–77), perhaps of Bulgarian extraction, identified by later traditions as a former deacon of the metropolitan Mark of Ephesus, the informal leader of the anti-Unionist party during the Council of Ferrara-Florence. Theoctist was ordained metropolitan of Moldavia by Patriarch Nikodim II of Peć (in office 1445–55) and practically reinstated the Byzantine rite of anointing the ruler for the benefit of Stephen III upon his victorious march on Suceava. The metropolitan entered the counsel of the realm and always counted among the first signatures on official documents issued by the chancellery. Modern scholarship extrapolated from his presence in Moldavia consequences in the fields of the rhetoric of power and of religious policy.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, Stephen's patronage on Mount Athos, continuing the practice of his predecessors and retained by his successors, represents an equally important vector in this cultural and spiritual connection of Moldavia to the Orthodox oikumene, an intense one I only have space to indicate briefly here.<sup>38</sup> To sum up, the agency of the clergy and the monastic communities, joined in a network of Eastern Christian anti-Unionists fighting against any confessional compromise, was instrumental for generating and maintaining the circulation of religious ideas and artistic practices. Their efficacy was grounded by their capacity to offer spiritual legitimization for the ruler and his potentates. In exchange, they were entitled to ask for the endowment of a specific system of cultural goods that exalted their status as gatekeepers of the indomitable Orthodoxy, perpetually presented as a citadel under siege.

This participation of Moldavia in broader cultural areas was enhanced by the matrimonial policy of the rulers. The strategic alliance with the Polish-Lithuanian Union, at the end of the fourteenth century, was sealed through the marriages of Alexander the Elder with Margareta, before 1400, and later with Ringala (Rimgailė, Ryngała), after 1419—both descendants of important Catholic families.<sup>39</sup> The geopolitical ambitions of Stephen III were confirmed by his marriages with Eudokia of Kiev in 1463, and later, in 1472, with Maria of Mangup (Theodoro), who proudly wore the patronyms Assanina and Paleologina.<sup>40</sup> A daughter from his first marriage, Elena, became, in 1483, the wife of Ivan the Young, son of the Grand Prince of Moscow, Ivan III. Peter Rareș entered the broad network of family links gravitating around the Serbian Branković dynasts through his marriage, in 1530, with Jelena, stepsister of Militsa (Jelena), wife of the Wallachian ruler Neagoe Basarab.<sup>41</sup>

These combined factors of ecclesiastical and matrimonial networks play a role in defining the Moldavian space as an area prone to artistic hybridity. The idiosyncratic aspect of Moldavian artistic production, especially in terms of built heritage, has been voiced repeatedly in modern scholarship, starting in the late nineteenth century, shaping the traditional reception of late medieval Moldavian visual culture.

## **Reconsidering the Canon**

The canonical reading of Moldavian art history stems from multiple stages and agendas. As northwestern Moldavia was annexed in 1774 by the Habsburg Empire, which took advantage of the precarious state of the Ottoman forces in the aftermath of the treaty of Küçük Kaynarca, this territory became an imperial province under the newly-coined name of Bukovina, i.e., “land of the beech trees.” Part of this historical episode, which extends until 1918, is the activity of a state-funded structure for the preservation of heritage, the branch of the Imperial-Royal Central Commission for the Investigation and Conservation of Architectural Monuments, created in Czernowitz (Rom., Cernăuți, now Chernivtsi, in Ukraine). Supporting the activity of this institution, the Viennese architect Karl Romstorfer restored several key monuments. Most importantly,

Romstorfer theorized the existence of a local style that he chose to name “Moldo-Byzantine,” stressing its Gothic features, a detail that made its products easier to integrate within a discourse of pan-Habsburg local cultural diversity. Alongside Romstorfer, another representative of the Viennese school, the art historian Władysław Podlacha, studied the local wall paintings, producing the earliest synthesis on this topic.<sup>42</sup>

The creation of the modern state of Romania brought forth, after 1919, a similar concern for the study and preservation of cultural heritage but obviously with a different expertise and agenda. Scholarship targeted mostly the Byzantine and Balkan roots of local artistic production in an effort to generate a standard national history of style based on “external influences” assimilated in an early stage, which are then driven by local creative genius toward a synthesis expressed through its “classical moment,” followed by an anachronistically labeled “manneristic” dissolution and loss of creativity.<sup>43</sup> In this logic, the early years of Moldavia, including the reign of Alexander the Good, constituted the first episode, in which Byzantium gradually supplanted the Western influence. Stephen III generated a cultural synthesis that gave birth to the Moldavian style, perpetuated by his equally heroic descendent, Peter IV. In the second half of the sixteenth century, the local style was, however, weakened and gave way to a “manneristic” dissolution under the pressure of external influences. This general history was seen as a filiation between great monuments and their replicas that created a teleological chain of causation and effect, in which the only missing parts were the great names of the “Moldavian school.” This agenda, widespread in scholarship until recently, sought to inscribe in the canonical history of Moldavian art spurious names of painters (the hieromonk Gavril at Bălinești, Thomas at Humor, and Dragoș Coman at Arbore). Criticism of this approach was voiced early on and prevailed especially due to advances in archeology and the recent restoration of crucial ensembles of wall painting.

The investigation of the earliest Moldavian built structures and of the original configuration of rebuilt monuments dramatically challenged the traditional views on the history of local architecture.<sup>44</sup> The continuity of purely Western structures, such as the late fourteenth-century Gothic chapel from Netezi-Grumăzești (a square nave vaulted with a supporting central

pillar) or the presence of a plausible cross-in-square structure as the original stage of Mirăuți Church from Suceava, challenge the traditional discourse. Moreover, the reconstructed evolution of architecture places the origin of the Moldavian idiosyncrasies (elongated, compartmented plans with a secondary inner narthex serving a funeral role) during the reign of Alexander the Good or, as the latest extreme, in the first period of the reign of Stephen III. The discourse on the plurality of styles and on the early birth of hybrid formulas should replace the traditional interpretations.<sup>45</sup>

## Conclusion

In 1968, in his chapter on Moldavian architecture during the reign of Stephen III, written for the handbook of Romanian art history published by the Romanian Academy of Sciences, Dumitru Năstase made several observations that remained overlooked.<sup>46</sup> He signaled that ecclesiastical architecture continued the building methods of military constructions and that another link between the two could consist of an additional principle, namely the alignment of rooms along a series of passages. Năstase hypothesized that the large and experienced teams of masons with Western expertise, active in the consolidation of military architecture, were kept by the ruler and commissioned to create the many churches built after 1487. Although the new perspective brought by archeology dismisses such interpretation, signaling the early birth of the Moldavian hybrid architectural practices, the general logic proposed by Năstase could be easily replicated. Alexander the Good was also involved in securing the defensive structure of his realm with the expertise of masons from the Polish-Lithuanian Union, and the intersection between Byzantine triconch plan and late Gothic building principles could have emerged in a manner that parallels the process described earlier for the production patronaged by Stephen III. The hybridity of Moldavian art between the late fifteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth century consists of this perpetual intersection of visual traditions. On the other hand, the hybridization of complementary visual traditions in other fields of art received lesser attention.



However, a close inspection of wall painting signals a fruitful field of investigation. The presence of the Agnus Dei within strictly late Byzantine iconographic contexts may offer the finest example of this kind.<sup>47</sup> The intersection of visual traditions is also exemplified by two depictions of the Circumcision of Christ, both occurring in the *katholikon* of Neamț Monastery ([Figure 5.5](#)). Until a closer inventory of fifteenth-century painting across the Balkans and the Slavia Ortodossa exists, the two images remain isolated within the Byzantine tradition. The hasty impulse to label them as mere quotations of Western models should be, however, resisted. They do partake in broader iconographic contexts that offer the possibility of reading them as visual arguments on Christ's dispensation.



[Figure 5.5](#) [Neamț Monastery, Church of the Ascension of Christ, 1497, naos, Circumcision of Christ, Baptism of Christ, end of the fifteenth century.](#)

*Source:* Vlad Bedros.

This assimilation of themes and motifs, integrated within a general discourse inherited from late Byzantine visual traditions, points at a possible general conclusion regarding Moldavian eclecticism across the two centuries briefly discussed earlier. On the Carpathian border of the Byzantine ecumene, Moldavia claimed a Byzantine legacy after the fall of Constantinople and represents a cultural area that constantly promoted this claim of identity. The material traces engendered by this cultural agenda did, however, rely on artistic practices that were made available by the shifting geopolitical configurations of this area, which was situated at the crossroads of commercial routes that interlink the Carpathian Basin, Transcarpathia, and the Black Sea with its many outskirts. The Moldavian urban settlements were cultural melting pots that harbored colonies of Hungarian, Saxon, Armenian, Balkan, and Eastern Slavic extractions, their percentages and sizes fluctuating over the decades. Though the Ottoman Empire did not manifest direct control over Moldavia, an Ottoman “soft power” was certainly at play, especially after the military disaster that ended the first reign of Peter IV. Usually avoided by local scholarship, the issue of the participation of Moldavia in the broader Ottoman cultural landscape should be essential in forthcoming investigations, replacing the still robust discourse of the “Ottoman influence” with an upgraded methodology.<sup>48</sup>

Within this logic, post-Byzantine Moldavia, especially between late fifteenth and mid-sixteenth centuries, was mostly defined by a strategic remembrance of the Byzantine tradition, sought within local resources and in the monuments of the past but also assimilated through the mediation of a network of pan-Orthodox centers. In the ebb and flow of material resources, available craftsmanship, and strategic alliances with agents of different cultures, this cultural project received kaleidoscopic nuance that could be best described as cultural hybridity that generated eclectic visual products.

## **Notes**

1. [For a recent assessment of the state of “post-Byzantine” art, see Emily L. Spratt, “Toward a Definition of ‘Post-Byzantine’ Art: The Angleton Collection at the Princeton University Art Museum,” \*Record of the Art Museum: Princeton University\* 71/72 \(2012–13\): 2–19.](#)
2. [For the concept of hybridity, see Andreas Ackermann, “Cultural Hybridity: Between Metaphor and Empiricism,” in \*Conceptualizing Cultural Hybridization\*, ed. Philipp W. Stockhammer \(Berlin: Springer, 2012\), 5–25. For the methodological approach of eclecticism, see Maria Alessia Rossi and Alice Isabella Sullivan, introduction to \*Eclecticism in Late Medieval Visual Culture at the Crossroads of the Latin, Greek, and Slavic Traditions\*, eds. Maria Alessia Rossi and Alice Isabella Sullivan \(Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022\), 9–26.](#)
3. [For a consideration of the historical background of this conflict and its outcomes, see Vladislav Gulyevich, “Expansion of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the Middle and the Second Half of the Fourteenth Century and Its Relations with The Horde,” in \*The Routledge Handbook of the Mongols and Central-Eastern Europe: Political, Economic, and Cultural Relations\*, eds. Alexander V. Maiorov and Roman Hautala \(London: Routledge, 2021\), 340–67; Vladislav Gulyevich, “The Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the Kingdom of Poland, and the Tartar World in the Fifteenth Century,” in Maiorov and Hautala, \*Routledge Handbook of the Mongols\*, 368–88.](#)
4. [\*Voivoda\*, a Slavic term designating the military chief, frequently appears in diplomacy, both in local and foreign documents that designate the ruler. However, the official title would usually be \*gospodar zemli Moldavskoi\* \(ruler of the Moldavian realm\). I therefore prefer the direct translation of \*gospodar\* \(ruler\), although the title “voivode” was cherished in modern scholarship, alongside its derivative term “voivodate,” designating the realm. See Benoît Joudiou, “Remarques sur la signification du titre \*souverain\* dans les Principautés Roumaines,” \*Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Medie\* \[Studies and essays on medieval history\] 19 \(2001\): 67–77.](#)
5. [For a general overview of the earliest stages of Moldavian history, see Dennis Deletant, “Moldavia between Hungary and Poland, 1347–1412,” \*Slavonic and East European Review\* 64, no. 2 \(1986\): 189–211.](#)

6. [Radu Popa and Georgeta-Maria Iuga, “Neue archäologische Forschungen und Konservierungsmassnahmen in Cuhea \(Bogdan-Vodă\), Maramureș,” \*Marmatia: Series Archeologie\* 8, no. 1 \(2005\): 301–2 \(summary in German\), 297–301 \(for the Romanian full text\).](#)
7. [Dennis Deletant, “Genoese, Tatars and Rumanians at the Mouth of the Danube in the Fourteenth Century,” \*Slavonic and East European Review\* 62, no. 4 \(1984\): 511–30.](#)
8. [For this complicated issue, see the highly polemical but dense study of Dan Ioan Mureșan, “Notes critiques sur l’histoire de l’Église de Moldavie au XVe siècle,” in \*Extincta est lucerna orbis: John Hunyadi and His Time: In Memoriam Zsigmond Jakó\*, eds. Ana Dumitran et al. \*Mélanges d’Histoire Générale\*, new ser., 1, no. 2 \(2009\): 115–42, especially 132–41 \(section III, “L’autocéphalie’ de l’Église de Moldavie après la chute de Constantinople”\).](#)
9. [A now-lost epitachelion from Staraia Ladoga Monastery, dated between 1421 and 1431, bore the donor portraits of Alexander and his wife, Marina. Alexander, presented by the Greek inscription as “Autokrator of Moldovlahia and Parathalassia,” sported a Byzantine \*skiadion\*. Warren T. Woodfin, \*The Embodied Icon: Liturgical Vestments and Sacramental Power in Byzantium\* \(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012\), 239 \(cat. 9\).](#)
10. [In the recent handbook for the history of local art published by the Romanian Academy of Sciences, Tereza Sinigalia revises the former hypotheses and proposes an alternative view, suggesting a Serbian source by paralleling the architectural structure of Rădăuți with the equally eclectic formula from Visoki Dečani \(“Arhitectura în Moldova de la începuturile statului până la sfârșitul domniei lui Ștefan cel Mare” \[Architecture in Moldavia, from state formation until the end of Stephen III’s reign\], in \*Arta din România: Din preistorie în contemporaneitate\* \[Art in Romania: From prehistory to contemporaneity\], eds. Răzvan Theodorescu and Marius Porumb \[Cluj-Napoca: Mega, 2018\], 1:164\).](#)
11. [In an act issued between December 1414 and April 1419, Alexander the Elder endowed villages to the painters Nichita and Dobre in exchange for an unclear artistic commission. \*Documenta Romaniae\*](#)

- Historica*, series A, *Moldova*, eds. Mihai Berza et al. (Bucharest: Romanian Academy Publishing, 1975), 1:55–7.
12. On the icon, see Georgi Parpulov, “The Miraculous Icon of Neamț Monastery,” *Revue Roumaine d’Histoire de l’Art, Série Beaux-Arts* 54/55 (2017–18): 119–21. For the nature of the cultural relationship between Wallachia, Moldavia, and the Balkan Slavonic states, see Emil Turdeanu, “Les Principautés Roumaines et les Slaves de Sud: Rapports littéraires et religieux,” in *Études de littérature Roumaine et d’écrits Slaves et Grecs des Principautés Roumaines* (Brill: Leiden, 1985), 1–14.
  13. Jonathan Eagles, *Stephen the Great and Balkan Nationalism: Moldova and Eastern European History* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014).
  14. Alexandru Simon, “How to Finance a Greek Rite Athlete: Venice, Rome and Stephen III of Moldavia,” in *Partir en Croisade à la fin du Moyen Âge: Financement et logistique*, eds. Daniel Baloup and Manuel Sánchez Martínez (Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Midi, 2020), 307–29.
  15. A recent reevaluation of this artistic production and its echo in the sixteenth century is given by Alice Isabella Sullivan, “Moldavian Art and Architecture between Byzantium and the West,” in *Byzantium in Eastern European Visual Culture in the Late Middle Ages*, eds. Maria Alessia Rossi and Alice Isabella Sullivan (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 200–31.
  16. These churches include St. George in Suceava (1522); St. Nicholas, Probota (1530); church of the Annunciation, Moldovița (1532); church of the Dormition of the Theotokos, Bistrița (1554); church of the Transfiguration, Slatina (1564); and church of the Resurrection, Sucevița (1595).
  17. Vasile Drăguț, “Ceramica monumentală din Moldova—Operă de inspirată sinteză” [Monumental ceramic in Moldavia—A work of inspired synthesis], *Revista Muzeelor și Monumentelor: Monumente Istorice și de Artă* [Journal of Monuments and Museums: Historical and Artistic Monuments] 45, no. 1 (1976): 33–38. This practice echoes the general taste for the immured ceramic vessels (*bacini*) encountered throughout the Mediterranean and Anatolia in the late Middle Ages. See Konstantinos Tsouris, “Glazed Bowls in the Late Byzantine

- Churches of North-Western Greece,” *Archeologia Medievale* 23 (1996): 603–24.
18. On the vaulting, see Sullivan, “Moldavian Art and Architecture,” 211.
  19. A slight paraphrase of a quote from Gheorghe Balș, *Bisericile lui Ștefan cel Mare* [The churches of Stephen the Great] = *Buletinul Comisiunii Monumentelor Istorice* [Journal of the Commission for Historical Monuments] 16 (1925): 14. It has become a usual commonplace in the studies addressing the medieval Moldavian architecture.
  20. Miltiadis-Milton Garidis, “Les Balkans et la Moldavie à la fin du XVe siècle,” in *La peinture murale dans le monde orthodoxe après la chute de Byzance (1450–1600) et dans les pays sous domination étrangère* (Athens: C. Spanos, 1989), 117–23.
  21. Emil Dragnev, “Ohrida, Moldova și Rusia Moscovită, noile contexte ale legăturilor artistice după căderea Constantinopolului” [Ohrid, Moldavia, and Muscovite Russia: The new contexts for artistic links after the fall of Constantinople], in *Românii și creștinătatea orientală (secolele XIV–XX)* [The Romanians and Eastern Christendom: 14th–16th centuries], ed. Petronel Zahariuc (Iași: Doxologia, 2021), 113–56.
  22. Engelina Smirnova, “Icoane ale măștrilor ruși din secolul al XV-lea la Mănăstirea Putna: Registrul apostolilor și prăznicarele” [Icons of the 15th-century Russian masters at the Putna Monastery: The register of the Apostles and the icons of the Great Feasts], *Analele Putnei* [Annals of Putna] 6, no. 1 (2010): 7–32.
  23. For a general approach to the issue of Byzantine chancel barriers, see Sharon E. J. Gerstel, ed., *Thresholds of the Sacred: Architectural, Art Historical, Liturgical, and Theological Perspectives on Religious Screens, East and West* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).
  24. See Paraschiva Victoria Batariuc and Sergiu Haimovici, “Éléments animaliers sur des carreaux de poêle découverts en Moldavie,” *Arheologia Moldovei* [Archeology of Moldavia] 24 (2003): 145-76 (Romanian text), 176-78 (French abstract).
  25. For a general outlook on the condition of tributary states in relation to the Ottoman Empire, see Viorel Panaite, “Watching over Neighboring Provinces in the Ottoman Empire: The Case of Tributary Princes from

- the North of the Danube in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” in *Tributaries and Peripheries of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Gábor Kármán (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 7–23.
26. On the circulation of Russian models, see Yuliana Boycheva ed., *Routes of Russian Icons in the Balkans: 16th–early 20th Centuries* (Seysssel: La Pomme d’or, 2016).
  27. Peter IV Rareș exchanged letters with the council of Bistrița (Beszterce, Nösen), asking for the provision of master masons. See Alexandru Lapedatu, “Cercetări istorice cu privire la meșterii bisericilor moldovene” [Historical research on the master builders of Moldavian churches], *Buletinul Comisiunii Monumentelor Istorice* [*Journal of the Commission for Historical Monuments*] 5 (1912): 23–29.
  28. André Grabar, “L’expansion de la peinture russe aux XVe et XVIe siècles,” in *Annales de l’Institut Kondakov* 11 (1939): 65–92, reprinted in *L’art de la fin de l’antiquité et du Moyen Âge* (Paris: Collège de France, 1968), vol. 2.
  29. See Sullivan, “Moldavian Art and Architecture,” 218–22.
  30. This hypothesis was cherished by the main local scholar that worked on this topic, Sorin Ullea, consolidated in his study, “La peinture extérieure moldave: Où, quand et comment est-elle apparue,” *Revue Roumaine d’Histoire* 23, no. 4 (1984): 285–311. A recent study on this peculiar motif appears in Alice Isabella Sullivan, “Visions of Byzantium: ‘The Siege of Constantinople’ in Sixteenth-Century Moldavia,” *Art Bulletin* 99, no. 4 (2017): 31–68.
  31. Ample discussion of a similar paradoxical situation appears in Cecily J. Hilsdale, *Byzantine Art and Diplomacy in an Age of Decline* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
  32. For the founding of the Moldavian Church, see Vitalien Laurent, “Aux origines de l’Église de Moldavie: Le métropolitain Jérémie et l’évêque Joseph,” *Revue des Études Byzantines* 5 (1947): 158–70, and Emilian Popescu, “Compléments et rectifications à l’histoire de l’Église de Moldavie à la première moitié du XVe siècle,” in *Christianitas dacoromana: Florilegium studiorum* (Bucharest: Romanian Academy, 1994), 455–77.

33. [For the difficult interval that followed the Ferrara-Florence Council, see Marie-Hélène Blanchet, “L’Église byzantine à la suite du concile de Florence \(1439–1445\): De la contestation à la scission,” in \*L’Église dans le monde byzantin de la IVe Croisade à la chute de Constantinople \(1453\): VIII Symposion Byzantion\*, eds. A. Argyriou et al. = \*Byzantinische Forschungen\* 29 \(2007\): 79–123.](#)
34. [Mureșan, “Notes critiques.” See, in contrast, the conclusions of the study published by Ștefan S. Gorovei, “Aux débuts des rapports moldo-byzantins,” \*Revue Roumaine d’Histoire\* 24, no. 3 \(1985\): 183–207.](#)
35. [During the Hesychast controversy, Iconoclasm was brought to the fore, as each party was accusing its opponents of reinstating an iconoclast theological tenant. See Jeffrey Featherstone, “An Iconoclastic Episode in the Hesychast Controversy,” \*Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik\* 33 \(1983\): 179–98; Lev Lukhovitskiy, “Additional Considerations on the Iconoclast Issue in the Hesychast Controversy,” in \*Hesychasm: Theology and Praxis from Late Byzantium to Modernity\*, eds. Tikhon A. Pino and Mihail Mitrea = \*Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai: Theologia Orthodoxa\* 67, no. 2 \(2022\): 185–99.](#)
36. [Marie-Hélène Blanchet, \*Georges-Gennadios Scholarios \(vers 1400–vers 1472\): Un intellectuel orthodoxe face à la disparition de l’Empire Byzantin\* \(Paris: Institut Français d’Études Byzantines, 2008\).](#)
37. [For an attempted prosopography for Theoctist I, see D. I. Mureșan, “De l’intronisation du métropolitain Théoctiste Ier au sacre d’Étienne le Grand,” in \*Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt: Atlet al credinței creștine\* \[Saint Stephen the Great: Athlete of the Christian faith\] \(Holy Monastery of Putna: Mușatinii, 2004\), 337–74. For his hypothetical contribution to fostering the rhetoric of power of Stephen III, see Matei Cazacu and Ana Dumitrescu, “Culte dynastique et images votives en Moldavie au XVe siècle: Importance des modèles serbes,” \*Cahiers balkaniques\* 15 \(1990\): 42–46.](#)
38. [Alice Isabella Sullivan, “The Athonite Patronage of Stephen III of Moldavia, 1457–1504,” \*Speculum\* 94, no. 1 \(2019\): 1–46.](#)
39. [Cristian Nicolae Daniel, “The Political and Confessional Landscape in Alexander the Good’s Moldavia: The Hussites,” \*Annual of Medieval\*](#)



- [Studies at CEU 12 \(2006\): 129–30, 136.](#)
40. [For the broader implications of this marriage, see Ștefan S. Gorovei, “The Principality of Theodoro \(Mangup\) and Stephen the Great’s Moldavia: Observations and Hypotheses,” in \*From Pax Mongolica to Pax Ottomanica\*, eds. Ovidiu Cristea and Liviu Pilat \(Leiden: Brill, 2020\), 146–68.](#)
  41. [Jelena Erdeljan, “Cross-Cultural and Transcultural Entanglement and Visual Culture in Eastern Europe, ca. 1300–1550,” in Rossi and Sullivan, \*Eclecticism in Late Medieval Visual Culture\*, 29–55.](#)
  42. [For the broader context of the emergence of the interest in art history and heritage preservation in Vienna, see Matthew Rampley, \*The Vienna School of Art History: Empire and the Politics of Scholarship, 1847–1918\* \(University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2013\). For the activity of Romstorfer and Podlacha, see Robert Born, “Die Wiener Schule der Kunstgeschichte und die Kunsthistoriographie in Rumänien der Zwischenkriegszeit,” \*Ars\* 41, no. 1 \(2008\): 121–22.](#)
  43. [This is a highly simplified evaluation; for a detailed assessment of the problem, see Shona Kallestrup, “Problematizing Periodization: Folk Art, National Narratives and Cultural Politics in Early Twentieth-Century Romanian Art History,” in \*Periodization in the Art Historiographies of Central and Eastern Europe\*, eds. Shona Kallestrup et al. \(New York: Routledge, 2022\), 192–213.](#)
  44. [Lia Bătrâna and Adrian Bătrâna, “Contribuția cercetărilor arheologice la cunoașterea arhitecturii ecleziastice din Moldova în secolele XIV–XV” \[The contribution of archeology to the assessment of religious architecture in Moldavia, 14th–15th centuries\], \*Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Veche și Arheologie\* \[Studies in premodern history and archeology\] 45, no. 2 \(1994\): 145–69.](#)
  45. [See, in this sense, Alice I. Sullivan, “Architectural Pluralism at the Edges: Visual Eclecticism of Medieval Monastic Churches in Eastern Europe,” \*Studies in History and Theory of Architecture\* 4 \(2017\): 135–51.](#)
  46. [Dumitru Năstase, “Arta în Moldova din secolul a XIV-lea până la mijlocul secolului al XV-lea: Arhitectura” \[Art in Moldavia from the 14th to mid-15th centuries: The Architecture\], in \*Istoria artelor\*](#)

- plastice în România* [History of Visual Arts in Romania], ed. George Oprescu (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1968), 1:331.
47. Vlad Bedros, “The ‘Hybrid’ Iconography of the Agnus Dei in Moldavian Wall Paintings,” in Rossi and Sullivan, *Eclecticism in Late Medieval Visual Culture*, 199–220.
  48. For a recent synthesis on this issue, see Ștefan S. Gorovei and Maria Magdalena Székely, “Old Questions, Old Clichés: New Approaches, New Results? The Case of Moldavia,” in *The Ottoman Conquest of the Balkans: Interpretations and Research Debates*, ed. Oliver Jens Schmitt (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2016), 209–42.

# 6

## BYZANTINE ELEMENTS IN WALL PAINTING IN THE KINGDOM OF HUNGARY

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The artistic heritage of the Middle Ages survived in a fragmentary state in the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary. The central part of the former kingdom, which included key royal residences and ecclesiastical centers, was deeply affected by historical circumstances, such as the sixteenth-century Ottoman occupation. Of all mediums, wall painting is the element of medieval church decoration that has survived in the largest quantity from medieval Hungary, particularly from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Thanks to significant discoveries during the last three decades, we can safely say that wall paintings provide perhaps the fullest view of the development of the visual arts in the Kingdom of Hungary and can serve as the basis for rewriting the art history of this area. Most of the monuments fall in the category of village churches, where painting cycles were usually commissioned by noble donors who had the rights of patronage to the

church. Traditionally, scholarship on Hungarian medieval wall painting focused on a few key problems, such as the legend of St. Ladislav or questions of stylistic connections, primarily that of Italian influence. Much less attention has been given to the contacts with Byzantine art in the sphere of wall painting, a question that was mainly raised in connection with Transylvania, where many Orthodox churches already existed in the Middle Ages. In this chapter, I am treating the question of Byzantine connections along two interconnected lines: first, I sketch a historiographical overview, and, second, I survey several groups of wall paintings where the presence of Byzantine visual conventions can be examined, from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries.

## Historical Overview

Following the coronation of Hungary's first king, Stephen I, in 1001, Hungary became a Western Christian nation, and over the centuries, the country became fully integrated into Europe.<sup>1</sup> As a Western Christian country, Hungary belonged to the geographical zone of East-Central Europe.<sup>2</sup> The kingdoms of this region were tied together not only by interconnected dynasties but also by a shared religion, alphabet, and language (Latin and German served as *lingua franca* for the entire region). This was especially pronounced in comparison with the regions lying immediately to the east and southeast: countries that embraced the Orthodox Christian faith, the Cyrillic alphabet, and the cultural influence of the Byzantine Empire. Of course, for much of its early history in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the new Hungarian Kingdom directly bordered Byzantium. There were close dynastic connections between the Hungarian Árpád dynasty and the Byzantine Komnenos dynasty, exemplified by the marriage of Piroska (Irene), the daughter of the sainted king Ladislav I (r. 1077–95), to Alexios I Komnenos in 1104.<sup>3</sup> The close ties of the eleventh century are manifest in such lavish objects as the lower part of the Holy Crown of Hungary, which originally came to Hungary with the Byzantine wife of King Géza I (r. 1074–77).<sup>4</sup> The female diadem was a gift of Emperor Michael VII Doukas, who is portrayed on the crown; the *Corona Graeca* was later transformed into a closed crown and became the

symbol of the Hungarian Kingdom.<sup>5</sup> Another enameled diadem made its way to Hungary in the eleventh century: the Monomachos Crown (Hungarian National Museum) depicts the Byzantine emperor Constantine IX Monomachos (r. 1042–55); his wife, Zoe; and her sister Theodora.<sup>6</sup> This crown came to Hungary during the reign of Andrew I (1046–60) and was subsequently lost in the tumultuous times of this period.

The relationship of the Árpáds and the Komnenos dynasty culminated with King Bela III, who was raised in the court of Manuel I Komnenos (r. 1143–80) and was proclaimed heir to the emperor in 1166; he eventually ruled Hungary from 1172 to 1196. Among the gilded and filigreed objects recovered from his tomb at Székesfehérvár was a Byzantine encolpion, indicating his fondness for such objects.<sup>7</sup> The origin of the double cross as a heraldic device of the dynasty and later the kingdom also goes back to this period and comes from the shape associated with Byzantine cross reliquaries.<sup>8</sup> Although architecture of the royal court of Bela III represents the earliest appearance of French Gothic structures in Central Europe, a small detail of the decoration of the palace chapel of Esztergom also indicates the presence of Byzantine luxury items in Hungary.<sup>9</sup> The late twelfth-century painted decoration of the chapel survives in the lower zone: here lions in roundels are depicted, facing each other in pairs. The decoration imitates a Byzantine silk textile, the likes of which were popular in the West around 1000; notable examples include the silk with an elephant pattern found in the tomb of Charlemagne in Aachen and the fabric with griffins within the reliquary of St. Siviard at Sens.<sup>10</sup> A more complex work at Esztergom, the famous Porta Speciosa of the cathedral (before 1196), presents a unique blend of Byzantine, French, and Italian artistic ideas; its technique of colorful marble incrustation is of Byzantine origin.<sup>11</sup>

With the shrinking of the empire and the emergence of new states south of Hungary, such as Serbia and Wallachia, direct contacts with Byzantium became less frequent, but Byzantine culture was still a formidable presence in Hungary. In fact, dynastic ties continued during the Latin occupation of Constantinople, when King Andrew II (r. 1205–35) brought the Byzantine princess Maria Lascaris on his way back from the Fifth Crusade, intending to marry her to his son, the future King Bela IV (r. 1235–70). The Árpád dynasty continued to rule Hungary until 1301, after which the Neapolitan

Angevins acceded to the throne. Hungary was at the peak of its power during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and this period was marked by eastern and southern expansion as well, something that increasingly became a struggle with the rising Ottoman Empire.

The kingdom fell in 1526 at the battle of Mohács, and Buda was captured by the Turks in 1541. The combined effects of the Reformation and the Ottoman Turkish invasion meant a clear break with medieval artistic tradition in Hungary, and the conquest resulted in the disintegration of the kingdom into three parts, which were only reunited at the end of the seventeenth century under Habsburg rule. As a result of these historical circumstances, most major sites in the center of the kingdom, towns such as Esztergom, Buda, Visegrád, and Székesfehérvár, were largely destroyed.<sup>12</sup> In the more peripheral areas of the kingdom, especially in Transylvania and the former Upper Hungary (present-day Slovakia), the artistic heritage of the Middle Ages has survived to a greater degree—however, modern Hungary lost these areas in the 1920 Trianon Peace Treaty. The territory of the medieval kingdom is now located in eight countries in addition to Hungary: Austria, Slovakia, Poland, Ukraine, Romania, Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia. The study of medieval art in this region has often been carried out within the framework of individual modern nation-states—although naturally the preservation and research of medieval monuments is in the common interest of Hungary and her neighbors.<sup>13</sup> In the context of this paper, when speaking of Hungary, the term will refer to the medieval Kingdom of Hungary and not to the much smaller modern state because the geographical frame of research is this historical state.<sup>14</sup>

## **Historiographical Overview**

The question of Byzantine artistic connections in medieval Hungary has been a topic of research from the beginnings of art-historical research in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup> In 1845, Auguste de Gerando published in Paris his work *Transylvania and Its Inhabitants*, in which he provided detailed descriptions of various sites he had visited.<sup>16</sup> He described churches and the remains of their medieval painted decoration. He was particularly struck by the richness of the wall paintings inside the Saxon Lutheran church of

Dârlos (Darlac). Gerando was convinced that the frescoes date from the fifteenth century and might have been one of the last achievements of a Byzantine painter, a Greek refugee from Constantinople. He points out that Byzantines were aware that the Hungarian Kingdom directly to their north was the final bastion against the Ottomans.<sup>17</sup> Ferenc Flóris Rómer, author of the first monograph on medieval wall paintings in Hungary, also called attention to the Byzantine characteristics of some of the monuments included in his survey.<sup>18</sup>

In various works published in the early twentieth century, the issue was often mentioned but never systematically explored. In the 1938 monograph on Romanesque art in Hungary, Tibor Gerevich discusses the Byzantine-style wall paintings at several key monuments. Gerevich, an Italophile, generally pointed to Italian sources of these Byzantinizing frescoes, the examples being Feldebrő, Ják (fresco of St. George), Lockenhaus (Léka), and Veszprém (Gisela Chapel).<sup>19</sup>

More interesting developments took place in Transylvanian research at this period, which became a zone of conflict in art history as well: for Hungarians, it remained one of most important regions of traditional Hungarian culture, while Romanians made attempts to provide a historical justification to joining Transylvania to the Romanian lands.<sup>20</sup> The Byzantine visual mode of painting in the medieval Orthodox churches in Transylvania played an important role among these claims. The most important contribution to their study was carried out by Ion D. Ştefănescu (1886–1981). Following a two-part book on the medieval painting of Moldavia and Bukovina, in 1932 Ştefănescu published a two-volume monograph on religious painting in Wallachia and Transylvania.<sup>21</sup> In the book, the question of Byzantine influence on medieval frescoes comes up repeatedly, and for Ştefănescu, this was proof of a historic Romanian population in various Transylvanian locations.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, the superior art-historical training of this Paris-educated Byzantinist also provided many useful iconographic descriptions and identifications. Ştefănescu remained active until the 1970s and published several further works on Orthodox churches and wall paintings in Transylvania.<sup>23</sup> The work of Virgil Vătăşianu (1902–93), a student of Josef Strzygowski at the University of Vienna, similarly spans the period from between the two

World Wars to well into the Communist period. Vătășianu focused on the art of the Romanian people and dedicated more attention to architecture than to painting.<sup>24</sup>

From a younger generation, Vasile Drăguț (1928–87) wrote extensively about medieval wall paintings, both Orthodox monuments and the Western-oriented, Catholic (or formerly Catholic) monuments of Transylvania. Along with numerous case studies, in 1970, he dedicated a monograph to the frescoes of Orthodox churches in Transylvania, and later he published the most important monograph on Gothic art in Transylvania.<sup>25</sup> An examination of Orthodox wall paintings in Transylvania was also the subject of Marius Porumb's book from 1981.<sup>26</sup> These postwar works were largely free from the cultural bias of interwar studies, and they greatly contributed to a better understanding of the complex artistic patterns of medieval Transylvania.

The most recent overview of the medieval murals of Orthodox churches in Transylvania was published by Elena Dana Prioteasa in 2016.<sup>27</sup> More recently the concept of a “hybrid” art developed, acknowledging that painters of various training could potentially work for commissioners of different confessions, resulting in a unique body of medieval monuments. Dragoș Năstăsoiu published both on Western painters working for Orthodox patrons and on Byzantine-trained painters working for Catholic patrons.<sup>28</sup>

On the other hand, the question of Byzantine influence in the rest of Hungary has been rarely examined. In his survey and catalog of wall paintings in medieval Hungary, Dénes Radocsay mentions Byzantine elements in connection with some monuments but does not detail the potential modes of transmission.<sup>29</sup> The first focused study dedicated to the topic was written by Géza Entz in 1967.<sup>30</sup> He called attention to the Byzantine style of some Árpád-period frescoes, such as Pécsvárad or Feldebrő, but gave most attention to the fresco cycle at Sântămăria-Orlea (Óraljaboldogfalva), painted in 1311. Following Vătășianu, he pointed to the Byzantine (Serbian) training of the painters and their attempts to conform to the Western architectural setting. He also emphasized that the patrons—the church was located on the territory of the royal castle of Hátszeg—belonged to a Western cultural tradition, as evident by the Latin inscriptions accompanying the scenes.



Byzantine influence in Hungarian paintings was analyzed in a broader framework by Melinda [Tóth, in her highly valuable 1974](#) monograph on Árpád-period wall painting in Hungary.<sup>31</sup> Tóth emphasized the very important role that Byzantine models played in the thirteenth century all over Europe, and she was able to clarify the Western intermediaries of some Byzantine elements in Hungarian painting. A study updating the book was published in 1995, in which she provided the first nuanced analysis of newly discovered fresco fragments from the Gisela Chapel of Veszprém.<sup>32</sup>

The Byzantinizing monuments of the Árpád-period have been more recently analyzed by Tibor Rostás in a series of studies.<sup>33</sup> He provides detailed analysis of monuments from the late thirteenth century and is able to distinguish between “Byzantine” and “Italo-Byzantine” wall paintings. This latter term has had a surge in popularity in recent decades in Hungarian art-historical writing in reference to paintings of the first decades of the fourteenth century, although the precise meaning of the term is often not clarified. The monuments grouped under this heading are chronologically anchored around three mural sites with secure dates: the nave frescoes at Sântămăria-Orlea (Óraljaboldogfalva) in Transylvania, dated by an inscription to 1311; the coronation fresco at Spišská Kapitula (Szepeshely) and some related monuments in Szepes County from 1317; and finally the frescoes of Cserkút in southwest Hungary, dated to 1335. The group, however, is far from homogeneous, as I will demonstrate. Along with Rostás, Tekla Szabó dedicated a series of studies to the Transylvanian monuments, while Gergely Kovács provided a much more nuanced analysis of Cserkút and other monuments.<sup>34</sup>

## **Byzantine Painting via the Balkans before and after 1300**

Examples of direct contact with Byzantine painting are rare in the Kingdom of Hungary. However, there are a few examples where the iconography, style, and technique of the painting together point to the Byzantine Empire or to Byzantine painting in the Kingdom of Serbia. The fresco of an archangel painted on the vault of the eleventh-century chapel of the Benedictine abbey of Pécsvárad (likely the original abbey church) is one of the earliest surviving wall paintings in the Kingdom of Hungary painted in

the Byzantine style. The technique of its execution—with a plaster base mixed with chopped straw—also points to Byzantium, but the frontal gaze and large eyes of the archangel represent a middle Byzantine style. Tóth was cautious in assigning a very early date to this fragment, suggesting that it was likely painted following a rebuilding of the abbey after a fire in 1158. Hopefully more of the figure will be revealed through cleaning and restoration in the future, perhaps along with some additional elements of the apse program.<sup>35</sup> The fresco fragments found among the ruins of the Deanery Church of Visegrád are even earlier: their style, as well as the Greek letter fragments of the inscriptions, indicate a mid-eleventh-century Byzantine workshop, perhaps the one that also decorated the monastery of St. Andrew established for Greek monks by King Andrew I.<sup>36</sup>

Some small fragments discovered among the ruins of the Franciscan church of Sremska Mitrovica (Száva-szentdemeter, ancient Sirmium, now in Serbia) are also among early examples of the Byzantine style in Hungary ([Figure 6.1](#)). Here fragmentary scenes from a Christological cycle (Christ Washing the Feet of the Apostles, Mary Magdalen Washing the Feet of Christ) are found on the eastern and northern walls of the original thirteenth-century sanctuary. In the middle of the eastern wall, Rostás identifies a three-figure Crucifixion that he dates to the middle of the thirteenth century.<sup>37</sup> Rostás also demonstrates that the painter came from the other side of the river, that is from the medieval Kingdom of Serbia. Despite the Byzantine style of the paintings, Latin inscriptions accompany the images.



*Figure 6.1* [Scene of Mary Magdalene Washing the feet of Christ, ruins of the former Franciscan church, Sremska Mitrovica \(Szávaszentdemeter\).](#)

*Source:* Attila Mudrák.

In Transylvania, the frescoes in the nave of the church at Sântămăria-Orlea (Óraljaboldogfalva) were most likely painted by artists trained in the Byzantine tradition—although the present condition of the wall paintings makes any judgment precarious.<sup>38</sup> In this church, the early group of frescoes, securely dated to 1311 with a Latin inscription, cover three walls of the longitudinal nave. An expansive Mariological cycle is followed on the northern wall with scenes from the Life and Passion of Christ. The south wall is decorated with a monumental Last Judgment, arranged in three registers. Although there is general agreement in the literature that these paintings are closely connected to Serbian monumental painting of the period, the very poor condition of the fresco cycle makes a clearer determination impossible at this point. Although these frescoes have often

been described as the best examples of the so-called Italo-Byzantine style of the first third of the fourteenth century, this designation is clearly incorrect if we accept that these painters originated from Serbia. Although the arrangement of the narrative cycles follows Western models, many images conform to Byzantine iconographic types.<sup>39</sup>

These three examples underscore that direct connections with Byzantine art or Serbian Orthodox painting occasionally existed. The stylistic features of several other monuments were also described in this framework by various researchers, but usually these connections are not sufficiently specific or the condition of the mural does not allow for a detailed examination. Such uncertainty surrounds the newly discovered Crucifixion fresco at Bač (Bács), in the former Franciscan church.<sup>40</sup> Another new discovery in the southern part of the kingdom, the Madonna fresco of the ruined church of Koprivna (Kaporna) in Slavonia, similarly shows very strong Byzantine features, however, no clear verdict has been made concerning the Byzantine or Italian origins of their painters ([Figure 6.2](#)).<sup>41</sup>



[Figure 6.2 Paintings in the apse before restoration, parish church, Koprivna \(Kaporna\).](#)

*Source:* Attila Mudrák.

About a century later, we again find Byzantine painters working for Western Catholic commissioners in Transylvania. The most notable monument of this type is the church of Dârlos (Darlac), where the entire Gothic sanctuary was decorated with a unified painted program. The complex program of the frescoes is limited to the sanctuary, and it is still not fully uncovered. On the north wall, a monumental Last Judgment can be seen, while the south wall is filled with a detailed narrative cycle of the martyrdom of St. Catherine. A sitting niche below is decorated with the Man of Sorrows, as well as the standing figures of St. Ladislav and St. Stephen. A series of saints decorate the eastern walls and the splays of the windows. Additional scenes, including the Crucifixion and a monumental image of St. Christopher, are painted on the exterior walls of the chancel's south side. These external frescoes lead Drăguț to posit a connection with the rich tradition of exterior paintings in Moldova, and he consequently dates the frescoes to the second half of sixteenth century.<sup>42</sup> However, the interior and exterior paintings are clearly painted by the same workshop, and a sixteenth-century date is quite implausible now that we see the much better-preserved frescoes inside the church. As expertly analyzed by Năstăsoiu, the painters working here were undoubtedly of Byzantine training and probably spoke Greek. This is most clearly indicated by the Latin-letter inscription that accompanies the image of a saint who was unfamiliar to the artist: St. Dominic, whose name is spelled “Themencos” in the inscription.<sup>43</sup>

Năstăsoiu identifies the stylistic analogies of the narrative images in the territory of the Kingdom of Serbia, and I agree with his conclusion that the decoration was likely executed in the decades around 1400. This period is marked by the continuous advance of the Ottoman Turks on the Balkan peninsula: Adrianople (Edirne) fell in the 1360s, Thessalonica in 1387, and the Serbian state also began to crumble under Ottoman pressure. Under these conditions, many artists likely sought refuge and employment further

to the north and west. The Dârlos (Darlac) painter also worked at nearby Şmig (Somogyom), executing some exterior paintings, such as a large St. Christopher; the inside of the church was richly decorated in at least two campaigns by Gothic painters at the beginning of the fifteenth century.<sup>44</sup>

It was most likely a different Byzantinizing painter who executed the characteristic figures of the Apostles and some Christological scenes (Nativity, Flight to Egypt) in the sanctuary of the Saxon church at Buneşti (Szászbuda) ([Figure 6.3](#)). These are of superb quality, and their full discovery and restoration should be a priority, especially as the fourteenth-century basilica is currently in a precarious state. So far, no detailed study has been dedicated to the frescoes.



[Figure 6.3](#) [Apostle from the wall of the former sanctuary, parish church, Buneşti \(Szászbuda\).](#)

Source: Gábor Gaylhoffer-Kovács.

## Byzantine Painting via Italy

It is well known that thanks to the import of artists (especially mosaicists) and artworks during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Byzantine visual conventions became widespread throughout Italy.<sup>45</sup> Byzantine compositions filtered through Italy also became prevalent in Hungary owing to the geographic vicinity and the continuous presence of Italian craftspeople since the Romanesque period. With the arrival of the Angevins, dynastic connections also fostered artistic exchange.<sup>46</sup> From the mid-thirteenth century, the frescoes of the so-called Gisela Chapel in Veszprém must be mentioned among the more famous monuments.<sup>47</sup> Rostás has pointed out their connections with Italian painting, primarily on the basis of the plastic decoration of the haloes (which only survive on the frescoes pieced together from fragments).<sup>48</sup> The paintings inside the sacristy of Zagreb Cathedral (dedicated by Bishop Timót in 1275) can similarly be regarded as examples of the Italian trend of Byzantinizing.<sup>49</sup> Additional survivals, such as the figure of the bishop and other saints in the windows of the castle chapel of Lockenhaus (Léka) in western Hungary, indicate that this style was quite widespread in the late thirteenth century.<sup>50</sup>

In Szepes County, both the 1317 fresco of the coronation of King Charles I at Spišská Kapitula (Szepeshely) and the depiction of the Legend of St. Ladislav at Veľká Lomnica (Kakaslomnic) follow Italian, specifically Neapolitan, models and can be regarded as reflecting the artistic trends of the royal court.<sup>51</sup> At Dravce (Szepesdaróc), the frescoes showing the Crucifixion and the Annunciation on the eastern wall of the sanctuary are much more strongly Byzantine in character but date from the same time. Unlike the other two frescoes, here more traditional themes are employed.<sup>52</sup> More recently, similar wall paintings have been discovered at the church of Veľký Šariš (Nagysáros) ([Figure 6.4](#)). Here, the three-figure Crucifixion was painted on the northeastern wall of the nave (as a side altar), while the Annunciation appeared above, on either side of the chancel arch (only the lower part of the archangel Gabriel survives, directly above the Crucifixion). While the frescoes in the two churches were not painted by the same workshop, they are very similar in conception and therefore likely in date as well.





Figure 6.4 Calvary on the side of the triumphal arch, parish church, Veľký Šariš (Nagysáros).

Source: Tibor Kollár.

When it comes to the other frescoes in the so-called Italo-Byzantine group, we need to be more careful with grouping them all together since only some of them can be connected to monuments in Italy. In Transylvania, the frescoes of Unirea (Felvinc) are among the best-quality examples from this group.<sup>53</sup> Scenes from an extensive Passion cycle have been discovered on the walls of the rectangular sanctuary. The cycle includes some Western elements, such as the Flagellation, but the iconography of other scenes is largely Byzantine. Only small fragments remain of a once extensive cycle in the same style at the church of Cricău (Boroskrakkó): details from a Passion cycle, covered by the later vault of the nave (especially a scene of the Last Supper), and a series of angels on the vault of the sanctuary.<sup>54</sup>

A workshop connection can be surmised here: these frescoes all preserve features associated with the Italian trecento, showing the transmission of Byzantine elements. A related monument but by a different painter survives in a small chapel at Sântimbru (Csíkszentimre, in the Szekler lands) and consists of only two beautifully preserved scenes: the Imago Pietatis (Man of Sorrows), with the Virgin and St. John, and the Annunciation.<sup>55</sup> In 2022, another fragmentary Annunciation scene was discovered on the eastern wall of the nave of the parish church of Viștea (Magyarvista) in Transylvania, which was painted in a very similar manner. The fresco was added after a wooden beam supporting the roof structure and the wooden ceiling of the nave were installed; dendrochronological examination dates this construction to 1330 ([Figure 6.5](#)).<sup>56</sup>



[Figure 6.5](#) [Annunciation, chapel, Sântimbru \(Csíkszentimre\).](#)

Source: Attila Mudrák.

In Transylvania, another group of monuments is also frequently discussed under the “Italo-Byzantine” heading. Here, however, Byzantine elements can only be discerned in a few elements, and they are mixed with Italian characteristics and elements of the early fourteenth-century linear Gothic style. The Passion cycle at the church of Ghelița (Gelence) is the most characteristic example of this group.<sup>57</sup> Most of the scenes follow pictorial types established in Middle Byzantine art, but they all share characteristic Western elements; two scenes of the surviving seven are fully Western in their iconography (the Flagellation and the Resurrection).<sup>58</sup> The origins of this cycle are to be found among thirteenth-century Italian Passion cycles painted under Franciscan influence (the Passion cycle at San Pietro in Vineis near Anagni is the best example). Other paintings of the Ghelița group indicate, however, that these fresco cycles must have been painted around the middle of the fourteenth century. At Ghelița, the legend

of St. Ladislav on the north wall was painted by the same workshop. Other narrative cycles—St. Ladislav legends at Crăciunel (Homoródkarácsonyfalva) and the legends of St. Ladislav and St. Margaret at Mărtiniș (Homoródszentmárton, destroyed)—can also be attributed to the same painters. More recently, Attila Weisz demonstrates that this workshop was also active in the center of Transylvania, painting a legend of St. Margaret and other scenes in the sanctuary of the church at (Sic) Szék, north of Cluj-Napoca (Kolozsvár).<sup>59</sup> A Byzantine-type Madonna (along with another one, now lost) was also painted there. The workshop was also active at nearby Fizeșu Gherlii (Ördöngösfüzes), although barely anything remains of the work there: the head of the Virgin from the scene of the Annunciation on the chancel arch and images of St. Emeric and St. Ladislav on the intrados of the same arch. Weisz draws a connection between these frescoes and those at Unirea (Felvinc) and Cricău (Boroskrakkó) mentioned earlier. Workshops capable of such varied production usually operated in towns serving as regional centers, taking on commissions within an area of easy reach. If we look at the map, for Unirea (Felvinc), Sic (Szék), and Fizeșu Gherlii (Ördöngösfüzes), this center could be Cluj-Napoca (Kolozsvár); at some point the workshop probably moved its operations further east, to the Szekler land.

### **Byzantine Painting via Central Europe**

Following the sack of Constantinople in 1204, Byzantine pictorial models became widely available in Western Europe, leading to a classicizing phase of Gothic art.<sup>60</sup> On the other hand, a very idiosyncratic interpretation of Byzantine art known as *Zackenstil* also appeared in the area of Salzburg, which then spread to the rest of Central Europe.<sup>61</sup> Melinda Tóth already called attention to the presence of this Central European Byzantinizing mode in Hungary, which can be detected in the thirteenth century: the altar fresco depicting St. George at the Benedictine abbey church of Ják, likely painted for the consecration in 1256, fits into this category. Often lumped together with Italo-Byzantine monuments, the frescoes at Vălenii de Mureș (Disznajó) in Transylvania can also be connected to such Central European analogies. Here a monumental Annunciation was once painted above the

chancel arch.<sup>62</sup> Two additional angels were painted near the apex of the arch; they turned in an adoring pose to the additional image of the blessing Christ painted in the center. The style of these frescoes is a kind of Gothic Byzantine that is exemplified by the ruffled drapery of one of the adoring angels. Similarly, the frescoes of Cserkút in western Hungary (1335) adopt Byzantine motifs in a Central European linear Gothic style. The origin of their style is in the Veneto, as Gergely Kovács demonstrates, but it was transmitted via southern Tyrol.<sup>63</sup>

### **Hybrid Art in Orthodox Wall Paintings in Transylvania**

There is one more group of monuments relevant for using and disseminating Byzantine visual conventions: churches of the Orthodox rite built for the Romanian population spreading in southern Transylvania during the Angevin period. The first Romanian Orthodox churches in Transylvania received their painted decoration in the late fourteenth century. These conformed to Byzantine models, and some of them were, in fact, painted by masters trained in the Byzantine tradition: the decoration of Crișcior (Kristyor) and Ribița (Ribice), both from the second decade of the fifteenth century, along with the frescoes of Leșnic (Lesnyek).<sup>64</sup> The Byzantine-style decoration of the nave at the Orthodox church of Hălmațiu (Nagyhalmág) in Arad County dates from the second half of fifteenth century; the sanctuary was painted earlier, in the Western tradition.<sup>65</sup> The paintings at Densuș (Demsus), dating from 1443, are also Byzantine in style.<sup>66</sup> The churches of Colț (Kolcvár) and Streisângeorgiu (Sztrigyszentgyörgy) also received Byzantine paintings. However, both in terms of iconography and sometimes even in style, Orthodox churches were also decorated by Western painters (for example at Strei/Zeykfalva in 1377).<sup>67</sup>

A further sign of hybrid devotion and artistic commissions was the addition of frescoes to Catholic churches by Orthodox patrons. These are generally accompanied by inscriptions in Old Church Slavonic, but the style of the frescoes is not necessarily Byzantine. At Sântămăria-Orlea (Óraljaboldogfalva), the village and its church were donated to the Romanian Candea family by Ladislaus V in 1446. They commissioned

additional frescoes for the sanctuary of the church.<sup>68</sup> Although the Apostles painted here are Byzantine in style and are accompanied by Old Church Slavonic inscriptions, it is hard to imagine that the family remained Orthodox after receiving the property. Perhaps the Union of the Western and Eastern church, declared at the Council of Florence in 1439, made such a hybrid solution possible (and desirable).<sup>69</sup> Similar frescoes once decorated the former Franciscan (later Calvinist) church of Déva. Today only the figure of one of the Magi and an Apostle survives from this once-extensive cycle, which was lost when the church was dismantled in the early twentieth century.<sup>70</sup> Another case can be observed at the church of Remetea (Magyarremete), where images accompanied by Greek inscriptions were added to the entrance hall of the church (the interior of the church is richly decorated with frescoes from the early fifteenth century).<sup>71</sup>

## Conclusion

Byzantine-style monuments represent just a small percentage of the medieval wall paintings that survive in the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary, most of which are characterized by the widespread styles of Western Europe, from Romanesque to late Gothic and early Renaissance. In fact, as pointed out earlier, much of the Byzantinizing monuments can also be connected to more general trends in Western art, whether in Italy or Central Europe. Connections with the art of the Orthodox Balkans are much rarer and can be explained by geographical proximity (as in the case of Sremska Mitrovica/Szávaszentdemeter) or by the particular needs of the Orthodox communities in Transylvania. A few isolated examples in Transylvania, dating from the last decades of the Byzantine Empire, round out the picture. Most examples survive from village churches, and there is no indication anywhere that the selection of a Byzantine or Byzantinizing choice was consciously made on behalf of the patrons. It seems that painters familiar with this tradition were occasionally available in various regions of the Kingdom of Hungary but primarily in Transylvania from about the mid-thirteenth century to the early fifteenth century. Hopefully, in the future, increased archeological, archival, and scientific examination will lead to a more precise chronology of the surviving material, and new discoveries will

also help us better understand workshop connections and international affiliations with this material.

## Notes

1. [The best survey of medieval Hungary is Pál Engel, \*The Realm of St. Stephen: A History of Medieval Hungary, 895–1526\* \(London: I. B. Tauris, 2001\).](#)
2. [The most influential text on the historical regions of Europe has recently been made available in a new edition: Jenő Szűcs, “The Three Historical Regions of Europe,” in \*The Historical Construction of National Consciousness. Selected Studies\*, eds. Gábor Klaniczay, Balázs Trencsényi, and Gábor Gyáni \(Budapest: CEU Press, 2022\), 231–98.](#)
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# 7

## BYZANTINE AND POST- BYZANTINE ART IN MODERN SLOVAKIA

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The territory of Slovakia, which borders the Carpathian Mountains in the north, is an integral part of the Danube region. It is nestled between Hungary to the south, Austria and the Czech Republic to the west, Poland to the north, and Ukraine to the east. In antiquity, the Danube was a natural border between the Roman Empire and the so-called barbarian world (Quadi, Gepids, Goths).<sup>1</sup> Even Marcus Aurelius and his army stayed here for some time, as an inscription on a rock in the Laugaricio (modern Trenčín, Slovakia) dated 179 proves. Later, two Christian worlds—*Slavia Latina* and *Slavia Byzantina*—intersected across the area for centuries. Accordingly, we can observe and study interesting intercultural and interreligious processes on the border of two great cultural powers. Although Slovakia has never been a part of the Byzantine Empire, its culture and traditions have been strongly present here since the ninth

century, most often taking an adapted form that respected the original Byzantine source. When, under the pressure of Western Christianity (Catholic and, since the sixteenth century, also Protestant), the connection with Byzantine and post-Byzantine culture was interrupted in most parts of Slovakia, a continuously predominantly Ruthenian (Ukrainian) settlement remained in the east of the country, on the borders of present-day Poland and Ukraine, which continued to use and develop Byzantine traditions. This was evident not only in the liturgy of the Orthodox Church but also in the art related to it: icons, liturgical illuminated books, and other objects used in the sacred Byzantine-Slavic rites.

This chapter focuses primarily on the icons of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, which have been preserved in situ and in museums in relatively abundant numbers. Of course, we know about written references to Orthodox parish priests or churches in the territory of eastern Slovakia already from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>2</sup> Some of the sixteenth-century icons from this territory have recently been integrated into the Byzantine and post-Byzantine context by Smiljka Gabelić, who considered four icons depicting St. Michael the Archangel with additional scenes.<sup>3</sup> A similar investigation is necessary for other monuments of this kind. Only then it will be possible to put together a complete mosaic of the Byzantine and post-Byzantine art of the Danube region. Within the currently available possibilities, a comprehensive picture of the historical connections and direct or indirect contacts between the Byzantine Empire and the surrounding territories of Christian Europe could thus gradually emerge.

## **Initial Contacts with Byzantium (Ninth to Fourteenth Centuries)**

Byzantine culture and art in the territory of today's Slovakia expanded mainly after the arrival of the mission of St. Cyril and Methodius to Great Moravia in 863. We have to deal with imported, sometimes very exclusive objects and works of art but also with the works of local authors who adapted Byzantine designs.<sup>4</sup> Contacts with the Byzantine-Slavic world are also evidenced by a tombstone inscription on a stone tablet found in Michalovce in eastern Slovakia by a prince of the Bulgarian principality,



Presian II (996–7 to 1060–1), son of Bulgarian tsar Ivan Vladislav.<sup>5</sup> Without any doubt, a Christian in such a high social position would have owned some icons, but they have not been preserved.

Monuments of art from these earliest times are indeed rare in Slovakia.<sup>6</sup> Byzantine and post-Byzantine culture and art of Slovakia are rarely included in foreign survey works. Recent publications on the relationship between Byzantium and the countries of Eastern Europe are no exception.<sup>7</sup> The written manuscript heritage from the ecclesiastical environment of the Byzantine-Slavic tradition of the Eastern Slavs has been studied in Slovakia very intensively, especially since 1990.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Byzantine Heritage in the Gothic Churches of Slovakia**

The traces of Byzantine heritage remained strong in the murals of the fourteenth-century Latin-rite churches. They were created during the reign of the Neapolitan Anjou dynasty, so there is a possible connection to similar monuments in southern Italy. Studies have also considered the possible Serbian origin of the authors of some monuments.<sup>9</sup> It is worth noting that on the Polish side of the Carpathians, there are murals (*graeco operas*) from the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries associated with the Byzantine tradition in the important churches of Lublin and the royal city of Krakow.<sup>10</sup>

It is interesting that the murals in the Catholic churches of Slovakia, which are close to Byzantine traditions, are most commonly found in the east of the country (Dravce, Veľká Lomnica).<sup>11</sup> Particular mention should be made here of the wall paintings of 1998 discovered in the church of St. James in Veľký Šariš near Prešov. Monumental paintings of the Crucifixion and the Archangel Gabriel of the Annunciation were uncovered on the north side of the triumphal arch. They are tentatively dated to the beginning of the fourteenth century. Even after restoration, the upper part of the compositions remained covered with secondary Baroque vaults. They are exceptions in the dominant Western Gothic environment and therefore deserve our attention and deeper study.<sup>12</sup>

### **Icons of Eastern Slovakia**

Eastern Slovakia's close connection with the Byzantine liturgical tradition, evident in the arrangement of sacred spaces and the use of icons, persists to the present day. It has been studied by several scholars in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.<sup>13</sup>

While the region's architecture has received attention since the 1900s, only Alexander Frický's (1925–2000) publications in the early 1960s attempt to begin a truly systematic and scientific study of icon painting in eastern Slovakia.<sup>14</sup> Particularly important in the study and popularization of the icons of eastern Slovakia was their exhibition in 1968, which was accompanied not only by the publication of small catalogs, but also by several responses and reviews.<sup>15</sup> The most comprehensive study was by Josef Myslivec, in which the author, based on the monuments available to him, outlined a number of important theses that remain relevant to this day.<sup>16</sup> First of all, it is his precise arguments supported by claims that the icons of eastern Slovakia belong to (western) Ukrainian icon painting, although later some Slovak authors tried to characterize the icons of Slovakia as “a unique manifestation in Central Europe associated with the cult of the Eastern rite” and thus to distinguish them from other icons of the wide range of monuments that stretches from Ukraine through Poland to eastern Slovakia.<sup>17</sup> Among some Polish art historians, there are attempts to create a special group of “Carpathian icons” out of this set of western Ukrainian icons.<sup>18</sup> Leading historians of the icon following Myslivec include, in particular, Romuald Biskupski, Jarosław Gienza, Michał Janocha, Vasilij Putsko, Heinz Skrobucha, and Konrad Onasch. I argue that the icons of eastern Slovakia have an important place within the cultures of the Byzantine and post-Byzantine world, where East and West meet.

Heinz Skrobucha included icons from eastern Slovakia among those monuments that are “designated as Galician or Ruthenian, or Ukrainian today.”<sup>19</sup> Frický wrote about the icon of the Last Judgment from Lukov-Venecia, claiming that it was “a good copy of the original Byzantine model” but not supplying any deeper reasoning.<sup>20</sup> Sviatoslav Hordynsky characterizes painters of the fifteenth-century Ukrainian icons, including those from eastern Slovakia, as masters who “adhered to the time-honored Byzantine rules of iconography, but at the same time they introduced their own elements. This is one of the characteristics that distinguish the Galician

icon from other national schools of iconography.”<sup>21</sup> Štefan Tkáč claims the icons and ecclesiastical Slavic manuscripts of eastern Slovakia from the sixteenth century show evidence of contact with the Balkans, which they undoubtedly had, but he does not recognize any direct contact with the nearest ecclesiastical authority, such as the Orthodox diocese in Przemysł and, through it, the metropolis in Kyiv.<sup>22</sup>

However, the painting of icons for Orthodox churches in eastern Slovakia remained linked to the Byzantine tradition, even after the adoption of the Uzhhorod Union with the Catholic Church in 1646. This situation lasted until the end of the eighteenth century. At that time, as a result of the growing Western influence of Baroque art and the training of icon painters at secular art academies, the means of expression changed. Thus, the previous color choices and symbolic forms became less popular and were replaced by illusory depictions in the style of Renaissance masters like Leonardo da Vinci and Raphael.

### **Icons of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries**

Although the oldest known records of the Orthodox clergy and churches in eastern Slovakia date to the fourteenth century, the preserved icons are from a later period. The icons from the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries testify to the continuity of post-Byzantine cultural and artistic traditions in the area. The oldest known monument of the Byzantine tradition from this area dates back to the early fourteenth century. It is a fragment of a bronze enkolpion of the Kyiv type, found under Kapušany Castle near Prešov.<sup>23</sup>

The preserved icons of the Virgin Hodegetria with the Apostles and Mary's parents, Joachim and Anna, are from the fifteenth century. One of them is from Becherov, and the other from the vicinity of Snina.<sup>24</sup> In style, both are very close to the Theotokos of Admiration from Storonevyči near Przemysł.<sup>25</sup> The maphorion of the Mother of God Hodegetria from Becherov is decorated with stylized lilies, a motif that was widespread in Italian-Cretan iconography of the second half of the fifteenth century ([Figure 7.1](#)).<sup>26</sup> In the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries, the figures of the prophets began to replace representations of the Apostles.<sup>27</sup> The relatively large number of such icons testifies to the high level of cult worship of the

Mother of God not only in cities but also in rural areas.<sup>28</sup> Analogous icons of Bulgaria are dated to the end of the thirteenth century, 1541, and later.<sup>29</sup> We know of similar Romanian icons dating back to the sixteenth century.<sup>30</sup>





[Figure 7.1](#) [Icon of the Mother of God Hodegetria with the Apostles, egg tempera on wood, late fifteenth century, 119 × 57 cm, Slovak National Museum—Museum of Ukrainian Culture, Svidník, Slovakia, provenance: Bekherov \(Becherov\).](#)

*Source:* Vladislav Grešík.

The icon of the Christ in Glory from Čabiny is considered to be a rare icon of the fifteenth century, as it probably belongs to those works that stand somewhere at the beginning of the formation of such iconography [Figure 7.2](#).<sup>31</sup> However, there is also the opinion that the icon was created as a result of a “misunderstanding by complex painters of complex symbolic iconography.”<sup>32</sup> We suggest that this may not be a misunderstanding, as similar iconography was also used on a seventeenth-century icon (Tročany).<sup>33</sup> Icons from the sixteenth century have depictions of the Evangelist symbols (Uličské Krivé). During the restoration of the iconostasis in Lukov-Venecia, it is evident that the icon of the Virgin was painted on a plaque on which the Christ in Glory was originally depicted; only the symbols of the Evangelists remained after the preparation for the new painting. This is clear evidence that priorities regarding the depiction of Christ changed significantly in the eighteenth century.



[Figure 7.2 Icon of the Christ in Glory, egg tempera on wood, fifteenth century, 115 × 92 cm, Slovak National Museum—Museum of](#)

[Ukrainian Culture, Svidník, Slovakia, provenance: Chabiny \(Čabiny\).](#)

Source: Vladislav Grešík.

Whereas very few icons from the fifteenth century are preserved in the territory of eastern Slovakia, there are roughly 30 icons extant from the sixteenth century. The unique icons of the region include a Mandylion from Lukov-Venecia ([Figure 7.3](#)).<sup>34</sup> Both sides of the icon display compositions that offer insight into the history of the icon. Similar icons with scenes, in which the veil is held by two standing archangels, are characteristic of west Ukrainian icons from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.<sup>35</sup> As for the style of this icon, the face of Christ follows the local traditions associated with the workshops of Przemyśl, and the archangels on the sides are close to the depictions on Cretan icons of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as well as Bulgarian or Macedonian icons of the seventeenth century.<sup>36</sup>



[Figure 7.3](#) [Icon of the Mandylion, egg tempera on wood, 1500–60, 55 × 89 cm, Slovak National Gallery, Bratislava, Slovakia, provenance: Lukov—Venecia.](#)

Source: Slovak National Gallery, Bratislava.

Most of the icons that have been preserved in eastern Slovakia are in some way connected with the environment of the early Orthodox and later the Greek Catholic cathedral city of Przemyśl (in present-day Poland), where icon painting workshops have been active for a long time.<sup>37</sup> Their works often found their way to the wooden churches of nearby eastern Slovakia. The icon of the Last Judgment from Ruská Bystrá was recently designated as the work of Oleksiy Horoshkovych of Przemyśl.<sup>38</sup> The artist of the icon of the Last Judgment from Lukov-Venecia was inspired by the Byzantine works that were used in Kyiv, too. The Orthodox believers of eastern Slovakia gravitated toward it from the ecclesiastical point of view.<sup>39</sup> There are also icons that were created according to an analogous iconographic pattern, but, from the artistic point of view, they are closer to folk art. Such monuments include the icon of the Last Judgment from Krásný Brod from the end of the sixteenth century ([Figure 7.4](#)).<sup>40</sup> The icons of the Last Judgment from the Carpathian region have been most fully treated by John-Paul Himka.<sup>41</sup>







[Figure 7.4](#) [Icon of the Last Judgment, egg tempera on wood, late sixteenth century, 217 × 133.5 cm, Slovak National Museum—Museum of Ukrainian Culture, Svidník, Slovakia, provenance: Krásný Brod.](#)

Source: Vladislav Grešík.

A very popular and widespread icon in eastern Slovakia was the image of St. Nicholas with scenes from his life and miracles, which was also directly connected with the ecclesiastical and artistic environment of Przemysl.<sup>42</sup>

Connections between the icons of eastern Slovakia and the post-Byzantine world can also be found in the list of revered saints and feasts. The great martyr St. Paraskeva (named on the central part of the icon from Rovné as Petka or as Piatka on the depiction of the Nativity of St. Paraskeva, which is one of ten scenes from her life on the same icon arranged in the shape of the letter “U”)<sup>43</sup> was dedicated to 13 churches,<sup>44</sup> including St. Demetrius of Thessaloniki (Figure 7.5) 19,<sup>45</sup> SS. Cosmas and Damian 27.<sup>46</sup> This corresponds to the relatively large number of preserved icons.





[Figure 7.5 Icon of St. Demetrius, egg tempera on wood, 1510–30, 129 x 86 cm, Šariš Museum, Bardejov, Slovakia, provenance: Ladomírová.](#)

Source: Vladislav Grešlík.

Icons of eastern Slovakia from the end of the sixteenth century onward are characterized by the use of folk elements in traditional artistic practices. Particularly valuable in this respect is the complex of the original iconostasis in Krivé, which was transferred to the newer wooden church (1826). The icons are arranged on the walls of the nave and the altar part. Today, they impress with their expressiveness due to the exaggerated proportions of the figures and their relationships to each other. Also interesting here is the use of expressive relief ornamentation on the halos and the framing of the images of the saints, which is a far more common element in the Bulgarian and Romanian icons of the seventeenth century.<sup>47</sup> Instead of the previous monumentality of the figures of saints, regardless of the size of the icons, including the depictions on the sides of the central part of the icon, there is a poeticization of the images, a greater amount of detail and ornamental-decorative elements.

The Byzantine origins have been ascribed to the icons of eastern Slovakia for centuries, evident not only in the iconography of Christ, the Virgin, the saints, the feasts, and the ordered arrangement of iconostasis but also in the popularity of icons of Eastern saints, such as St. Demetrius and St.

Paraskeva. Here we can fully agree with Mykhailo Pryjmych's claim that the Byzantine tradition was a “sign of cultural identity.”<sup>48</sup>

## Conclusion

In the future, scholarship will trace further comparisons between the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century icons from eastern Slovakia and analogous objects from both neighboring and more distant regions. In addition, it will be necessary to involve linguists in the research to clarify the specifics of the inscriptions on the icons.

The connection with Byzantine traditions continued to be evident in the eastern Slovakian icons of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which constitute another, equally interesting topic for study. Despite the connection of the Orthodox Church with the Catholic Church formalized at the Uzhhorod Union of 1646, the Byzantine and post-Byzantine heritage remained visible in the icons. The penetration of Western elements was very slow. German and Dutch Renaissance and baroque graphic designs were creatively adapted to the traditions and needs of icon painting. This process lasted until the beginning of the nineteenth century, when painters, graduates of the Academy of Arts in Vienna, began to decorate the churches of the Byzantine-Slavic rite, moving away from the Byzantine traditions and preferring to follow the example of Leonardo and Raphael.

## Notes

1. [See Bohuslav Chropovský, “Československo v pravěku” \[Czechoslovakia in prehistoric times\], in \*Přehled dějin Československa vol. I/1 \(do roku 1526\)\*, eds. Jaroslav Purš and Miroslav Kropilák \(Prague: Academia, 1980\), 35–37; Patrick K. O' Brien, ed., \*Philip's Atlas of World History\* \(London: University of London, 2007\), 56.](#)
2. [For example, the small town of Svidník in the northeast of Slovakia near the border with Poland existed before the thirteenth century. The oldest written record mentioning its own Orthodox parish priest dates back to 1478. See Ferdinand Uličný, \*Dejiny osídlenia Šariša\* \[History of the Šariš settlement\] \(Košice: Východoslovenské vydavateľstvo,](#)

- 1990), 301, 445. If there was an Orthodox parish priest at that time, the church must have possessed at least the basic icons.
3. The icons are from the following villages: Rovné, Uličské Krivé, Krivé, and Nová Sedlica. See Smiljka Gabelić, *Vizantijski i postvizantijski tsiklusi Arkhandzela XI–XVIII vek: Pregled spomenika* [Byzantine and post-Byzantine cycles of the Archangels (eleventh to eighteenth centuries): Corpus] (Beograd: Institut za istorija umetnosti, 2004), at 212–15, 312–14. The author even mentioned an icon from Matysova dating to the late seventeenth century (313).
  4. Štefan P. Holčík, “Byzantské emaily z Ivanky pri Nitre” [Byzantine enamels from Ivanka pri Nitre], *Ars* 18, no. 1 (1984): 35–50; Alexander Avenarius, *Byzantská kultúra v slovanskom prostredí v VI.–XII. storočí. (K problému recepcie a transformácie)* [Byzantine culture in the Slavic environment in the sixth–twelfth centuries. (On the problem of reception and transformation)] (Bratislava: Veda, 1992), 52–96; Peter Ivanič, “K problematike byzantských importov na území Veľkej Moravy v 9. storočí” [On the matter of imported artifacts from the Byzantine Empire to the territory of Great Moravia in the 9<sup>th</sup> century], *Konštantínove listy / Constantine's Letters* 9, no. 1 (2016): 3–10; Andrej Botek, “Byzantské vplyvy v ranostredovekej sakrálnej architektúre Slovenska” [Byzantine influences in early medieval sacred architecture in Slovakia], *Konštantínove listy / Constantine's letters* 10, no. 1 (2017): 150–79; Tomáš Gábriš, “Opäťovne k tzv. Monomachovej korune” [Back to the so-called Monomach Crown], *Ars* 54, no. 2 (2021): 155–69, with an extensive bibliography.
  5. See Vojtech Tkadlčík, “Kyrylivs'kyy nadpys v Mykhalivtsiakh” [Cyrillic inscription in Michalovce], in *Naukovyy zbirnyk Muzeiu ukrajinskoj kul'tury u Svydnyku* (Prešov: Slovenské pedagogické nakladateľstvo v Bratislave—Oddelenie ukrajinskej literatúry v Prešove, 1986), 14:396–410; Plamen Pavlov, *Kniaz Presian Vtori—poslednyat vladetel na Pyrvoto bylgarsko tsarstvo i pretendent za vizantiyska korona 966/7–1060/61* [Prince Presian II (the last ruler of the First Bulgarian Kingdom 966–7 to 1060–1)] (Veliko Trnovo—Stara Zagora: Reklamno-izdatelska kyshta Shibilev, 1993); Plamen Pavlov, *Zalezüt na Pürvoto bülgarsko tsarstvo* [The Sunset of the First

- Bulgarian Kingdom] (Sofia: Akademichno izdatelstvo “Prof. Marin Drinov,” 1999), 23–53; Vasilka Tăpkova-Zaimova, *Bulgarians by Birth. The Comitopuls, Emperor Samuel and Their Successors According to Historical Sources and Historiographic Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 19; Marián Vizdal and Nikolay Nikolov, “Epigrafskiyat pametnik ot rotondata v Michalovce v svetlinata na novite prouchvaniya,” [The epigraphic monument from the rotunda in Michalovce in light of new studies], *Preslavska knizhovna shkola* (Shumen: Shumenski universitet, 2006), 9:408–25.
6. Lubomíra Kaminská, “Románska sakrálna stavba a cintorín v Trebišove / Romanischer Kirchenbau und Friedhof in Trebišov,” in *Slovenská archeológia* 30, no. 2 (1982): 429–51; Zuzana Ševčíková, “Odkaz Byzancie v veľkomoravskom umení Slovenska: Náčrt k problémom 10.–13. storočia” [The legacy of Byzantium in the Great Moravian art of Slovakia: Sketch for problems, tenth–thirteenth centuries], in *Slovensko a európsky juhovýchod: Medzikultúrne vzťahy a kontexty; Zborník k životnému jubileu Tatiany Štefanovičovej*, eds. Alexander Avenarius and Zuzana Ševčíková (Bratislava: Katedra všeobecných dejín a Katedra archeológie FFUK, 1999), 126–51.
  7. We could hardly suppose that works from eastern Slovakia would make it into a brief history of icon painting, when even Ukraine is not represented in these projects. See Olga Popova, Engelina Smirnova, and Paola Cortesi, *Ikony [Icons]* (Warsaw: Arkady, 2000), 107–10. Konrad Onasch and Annemarie Schnieper mention Ukrainian icons on several rare occasions, but they tend to choose icons that are more folk art (*Ikonen: Faszination und Wirklichkeit* [Munich: Orbis, 2001], 67). In her study of Ukrainian icons, Natalya Komashko examines, among other things, icons from the territory of present-day Poland but does not even mention analogous monuments from eastern Slovakia (“Ukrainskaya ikonopis’” [Ukrainian icon painting], in *Istoriya ikonopisi VI–XX veka: Istoki, Traditsii, Sovremennost’* [The history of the icon: Stories, traditions, modernity, sixth–twentieth centuries], eds. Lilya Evseeva, Natalya Komashko, Mikhail Krasilin, et al. (Moskva: Art-BMB, 2002), 189–96). See also Maria Alessia Rossi and Alice Isabella Sullivan, eds., *Byzantium in Eastern European Visual Culture in the Late Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 4.

8. [Ralph M. Cleminson, \*Cyrilské rukopisy na Slovensku: Súborný katalóg\* \[Cyrillic manuscripts in Slovakia: A file catalogue\] \(Martin: Vydavateľstvo Matice slovenskej, 1996\); Peter Zubko, “Tangenty latinsko-byzantského spolužitia pod Karpatmi ako príležitosť pre revitalizáciu hodnôt” \[Tangents of Latin-Byzantine coexistence under the Carpathians as an opportunity for the revitalization of values\], \*Slavica Slovaca\* 56, no. 3 \(2021\): 403–8; Peter Žeňuch, “Cyrilské a latinské písomnosti byzantskej tradície v kontexte kultúrneho i náboženského pluralizmu v regióne pod Karpatmi” \[Cyrillic and Latin documents of the Byzantine tradition in the context of cultural and religious pluralism in the region below the Carpathians\], in \*Poznávanie kultúrneho dedičstva sv. Cyrila a Metoda\*, eds. Jozef Michalov, Martin Hetényi, Peter Ivanič, and Zvonko Taneski \(Nitra: Univerzita Konštantína Filozofa v Nitre Filozofická fakulta, 2007\), 21–39.](#)
9. [Barbara Glocková connects the wall paintings of the Annunciation and Crucifixion in Dravce with the Orthodox Serbian environment and dates them to the second half of the thirteenth century. See Barbara Glocková, “Dravecké Ukrižovanie a Zvestovanie: Otázka ‘južného vplyvu’ v stredovekej nástennej maľbe Slovenska / La Crocifissione e l’Annunciazione di Dravce: Il cosiddetto ‘influsso meridionale’ nella pittura mural in Slovacchia in epoca medioevale,” in \*Ročenka Slovenskej národnej galérie v Bratislave Galéria\* \[Yearbook of the Slovak National Gallery in Bratislava\] \(Bratislava: Slovenská národná galéria, 2002\), 7–27, at 25.](#)
10. [For newer studies with a rich bibliography, see Mirosław Piotr Kruk, \*Malowidła Graeco opere fundacji Jagiellonów jako postulat unii państwowej i kościelnej oraz jedności Kościoła\* \[Paintings Graeco opere support the foundations of the Jagiellonians as a postulatory union of the state and the church and the unity of the church\], in \*Między teologią a duszpasterstwem powszechnym na ziemiach Korony doby przedtrydenckiej: Dziedzictwo Średniowiecza i wyzwania XV–XVI wieku\*, ed. Waclaw Walecki \[Between theology and universal ministry in the lands of the Crown of the pre-Tridentine era: Medieval heritage and the challenges of the 15th–16th centuries\] \(Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2017\), 5:145–201.](#)

11. [Vlasta Dvořáková, Josef Krása, and Karel Stejskal, \*Středověká nástěnná malba na Slovensku\* \[Medieval mural painting in Slovakia\] \(Prague: Odeon—Tatran, 1978\), 92–93 \(Dravce, denoted as \*maniera byzantina\*\), 164–65 \(Veľká Lomnica\); Milan Togner and Vladimír Plekanec, \*Stredoveká nástenná maľba na Spiši\* \[Medieval wall painting in Spiš\] \(Bratislava: Arte Libris—Plekanec & Havran, 2012\), 40–41 \(Dravce\), 66–86 \(Veľká Lomnica\).](#)
12. [See Dvořáková, Krása, and Stejskal, \*Středověká nástěnná malba na Slovensku\*; Milan Togner, \*Nástenná maľba v Gemeri\* \[Mural painting in Gemer\] \(Bratislava: Tatran, 1989\); Katarína Biathová, \*Maliarske prejavy stredovekého Liptova\* \[Paintings of medieval Liptov\] \(Bratislava: Tatran, 1983\).](#)
13. [See, e.g., Igor Grabar, “Derevyannoe tserkovnoe zodchestvo Prikarpatckoy Rusi” \[Wooden churches of the Carpathian Rus’\], in \*Istoriya russkago iskusstva, vol. 2, Arkhitektura: Istoriya arkhitektury, part 2, Do-petrovskaya epokha \(Moskva i Ukraina\)\*, ed. Igor Grabar \(Moskva: Izdanie I. Knebel’, \[1911\]\), 2.2:361–76; Vladimir Sakhanev, “Novyy karpatorusskiy epigraficheskiy material” \[New Carpathian-Russian epigraphic material\], in \*Naukovyy zbornyk tovarystva “Prosvita” v Uzhhorodi za 1932 rok: Rochnyk IX \(Uzhhorod, 1932\)\*, 68–100; Vladimir Sakhanev, “Karpatorusskaya ikonopis’” \[Carpathian-Russian icon painting\], \*Central’naya Evropa 10 \(1931\)\*: 588–97; Vladimir Sachanev, “Malba ikon na Podkarpatské Rusi” \[Icon painting in Subcarpathian Rus’\], in \*Podkarpatská Rus: Sborník\* \(Bratislava: Podkarpatoruské nakladatelství Josef Stejskal, 1936\), 245–48. Quite recently, the penetration of Byzantine elements has also been investigated in the illuminations of Cyrillic liturgical manuscripts \(fifteenth–sixteenth centuries\). They implemented several variations of the Balkan braid ornaments. See Vladyslav Greshlyk, “Kyrylychni rukopysni knyhy v Slovachchyni ta yikhne khudozhne ozdoblennya \(poperedni zavvazhennya\)” \[Cyrillic manuscripts in Slovakia and their artistic decoration\], in \*Istoriya relihiy v Ukrayini: Naukovyy shchorichnyk\* \[History of religions in Ukraine: Scientific Yearbook\] \(Lviv: Logos, 2009\), 2:420–25; \*Pramene byzantskej tradície na Slovensku: K výstave z príležitosti Roka kresťanskej kultúry 2010 / Sources of the Byzantine Tradition in Slovakia. An Exhibition\*](#)



- Organized within the Year of Christian Culture 2010*, eds. Peter Žeňuch and Andrej Škoviera (Bratislava: Slovenský komitét slavistov / Slavistický ústav Jána Stanislava SAV, 2010).
14. Alexander Frický, “Problém feudálnej spravodlivosti na dvoch exponátoch Šarišského múzea v Bardejove” [The problem of feudal justice in two exhibits of the Šariš Museum in Bardejov] (Bratislava: Osveta, 1962); Alexander Frický, “O niektorých pamiatkach východného Slovenska,” [About some monuments of eastern Slovakia], *Vlastivedný časopis* 16, no. 2 (1967): 82–86; Alexander Frický, “Ikony zo severovýchodného Slovenska” [Icons from northeastern Slovakia], *Umění a řemesla* 2 (1968): 50–55; Alexander Frický, “Pamiatky ikonopisnej tvorby z východného Slovenska” [Monuments of icon painting from eastern Slovakia], in *Šarišské múzeum v Bardejove: Zborník 2* (Košice: Východoslovenské vydavateľstvo, 1969), 175–91; Alexander Frický, “Ikony z východného Slovenska” [Icons from eastern Slovakia], *Výtvarný život* 6 (1970): 16–23.
  15. Alexander Frický, *Ikony z východného Slovenska* [Icons from eastern Slovakia] (Bratislava: Šport, 1968). For the incorporation of Ukrainian icons into Slovak culture, see Karol Vaculík and Štefan Tkáč, *Ikony na Slovensku* [Icons in Slovakia] (Bratislava: Slovenská národná galéria, 1968).
  16. Josef Myslivec, “Východoslovenské ikony” [Icons of Eastern Slovakia], *Umění* 5 (1969): 404–24.
  17. Magda Keletiová, “Ikonová tvorba na Slovensku” [Icon art in Slovakia], in *Umenie Slovenska: Stále expozície Slovenskej národnej galérie* (Bratislava: Slovenská národná galéria, 1994), 92.
  18. For a critical overview of such claims, see Volodymyr Stefanovych, “Ikona karpacka” [Carpathian icon], in *Zapysky Naukovoho Tovarystva imeni Shevchenka*, vol. 236, *Pratsi Komisii obrazotvorchoho ta uzhytkovoho mystetstva* (Lviv: Naukove tovarystvo imeni Shevchenka, 1998), 657–62; Volodymyr Aleksandrovyh, “Spokonviku bula Moldova?” [Has Moldova been forever?], in *Kovchek: Naukovyy zbirnyk iz tserkovnoi istorii. Chyslo 4: Eklezial’na y natsional’na identychnist’ hreko-katolykiv Tsentral’no—Skhidnoi Evropy*, ed. Oleh

- Turij (Lviv: Vydavnytstvo Ukrainського Katolytskoho Universytetu, 2003), 273–83.
19. Heinz Skrobucha, *Icons in Czechoslovakia* (London: Hamlyn, 1971), 15.
  20. Alexander Frický, *Ikony z východného Slovenska* [Icons from eastern Slovakia] (Košice: Východoslovenské vydavateľstvo, 1971), 9. This seems to be a misunderstanding, as there is no evidence that eastern Slovakia had direct contact with the remote region of Novgorod the Great in northern Russia. However, the iconography of this icon was first seen in a fifteenth-century icon from the Galician Ukrainian village of Vanivka (now in Poland). See Mariya Helytovych, *Ukrajinski ikony XIII–pochatku XVI stolisť zi zbírky Natsionalnoho muzeyu u Lvovi imeni Andreya Sheptytskoho: Albom-kataloh* [Ukrainian icons of the twelfth–early sixteenth centuries] (Lviv: Natsionalnyy muzey u Lvovi imeni Andreya Sheptytskoho; Kyiv: Mayster knyh, 2014), 102–5, 299. See also Alexander Frický, “Metamorfózy byzantského ikonopisu na ikonách z východného Slovenska,” [The metamorphosis of Byzantine iconography in east Slovakian icons], *Vlastivedný časopis* 34, no. 3 (1985): 114–19. Frický states here, without giving further justification, that these icons are marked by “postbyzantine Mannerism.”
  21. Sviatoslav Hordynsky, *The Ukrainian Icon of the XIIth to XVIIIth Centuries* (Philadelphia: Providence Association, 1973), 15.
  22. Štefan Tkáč, *Ikony zo 16.–19. storočia na severovýchodnom Slovensku* [Icons from the 16th–19th centuries in northeastern Slovakia] (Bratislava: Tatran, 1980), 22–24.
  23. Enkolpions were probably brought to the territory of Kievan Rus’ from Byzantium at the end of the eleventh century. Later, they were made in Kyiv according to Byzantine models. See Borys Zhuk, “Khresty ta obrazky Kyivskoi Rusi,” in *Analecta Ordinis S. Basilii Magni*, series 2, section 2, vol. 2 (8), fasc. 1–2 (Romae: Sumptibus PP. Basilianorum, 1954), 14–15, ill. 8 A. They could also reach eastern Slovakia from the nearby town of Sanok in southeastern Poland, where there was a workshop for casting. See Jerzy Ginalski and Pior N. Kotowicz, “Gród u ‘wrót węgierskich’—staroruski Sanok i jego najbliższe zaplecze” [The stronghold at the ‘Hungarian gate’—Old Ruthenian Sanok and its

immediate hinterland], in *Materiały Kongresu mediewistów polskich*, vol. 3, *Pogranicze w polskich badaniach mediewistycznych*, ed. Andrzej Janeczek, Michał Parczewski, and Michał Dzik (Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, 2019), 131.

Part of the enkolpion was found by amateur “treasure hunters” in 1996. It is currently in the collection of the Regional Museum in Prešov. It was first published by Vladislav Grešlík, “Khrestyk z časiv Koriatovyichiv” [Cross from the time of Koryatovyich], in *Sakralne mystetstvo Boykivshchyny: Treti naukovi chytannya pamyati M. Drahana* (Drohobych: Vidrozzennya, 1998), 195–96.

24. Miroslav Sopoliġa, *Tradície hmotnej kultúry Ukrajincoŵ na Slovensku* [Traditions of material culture of Ukrainians in Slovakia] (Bratislava: VEDA, vydavateľstvo Slovenskej akadémie vied, 2006), 253; Marta Hrebíčková, *Ikony v zbierkach Šarišskej galérie v Prešove* [Icons in the collections of the Šariš Gallery in Prešov] (Prešov: Šarišská galéria v Prešove, 2002), 8–9. The icon is dated to the sixteenth century by the author.
25. This type dates to the middle of the fifteenth century, according to Natalia Shamardina (*Ukrainska ikona, XV–XVII stoliť* [Ukrainian icon, 15th–16th centuries] [Lviv: Muzei narodnoi arkhitektury ta pobutu u L'vovi, 1994], 4–5, fig. 4) or to the first half of the fifteenth century, according to Patriarkh Dymytriy (Yarema) (*Ikony pys Zakhidnoi Ukrainy, XII–XV st.* [Icon painting of western Ukraine, 12th–15th centuries] [Lviv: Vydavnytstvo Drukars'ki kunshty, 2005], 327, fig. 397).
26. Myrtale Acheimastou-Potamianou, *Icons of Zakynthos* (Athens: Holy Metropolis of Zakynthos and Strophades, 1998), 114.
27. On the icons from Rovné (second half of the sixteenth century), Krivé (end of the sixteenth century), and Šemetkovce (first half of the seventeenth century), see Tkáč, *Ikony zo 16.–19. storočia*, figs. 13, 100, 108. On that from Uličské Krivé (end of the sixteenth century), see Gabriela Zálezáková, “Reštaurovanie kultúrnych pamiatok v SSR v osemdesiatych rokoch” [Restoration of cultural monuments in the Slovak Socialist Republic in the Eighties], *Pamiatky a príroda* 4 (1989): 10.

28. [See Miroslaw Piotr Kruk, \*Zachodnioruskie ikony Matki Boskiej z Dzieciątkiem w wieku XV–XVI\* \[Western Ruthenian icons of the Mother of God with Child in the fifteenth–sixteenth centuries\] \(Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2000\).](#)
29. [See Kostadinka Paskaleva, \*Die bulgarische Ikone\* \(Sofia: BALKAN Sofia-press, 1981\), 71, 115, 125, 193, 195.](#)
30. [See Corina Nicolescu, \*Icoane vechi românești\* \(Bucharest: Meridiane, 1976\), figs. 1, 4, 21, 25, 34.](#)
31. [Sopoliga, \*Tradície hmotnej kultúry Ukrajincoŭ\*, 251; Dymytriy \(Yarema\), \*Ikonopys Zakhidnoi Ukrainy\*, 101, fig. 96.](#)
32. [Vasyl' Putsko, "Ikonohrafichni problemy obraza Khrysta v slavi" \[Iconographic problems of the image of Christ in Glory\], in \*Ukrains'ka Hreko-Katolytska Tserkva i relihiyne mystetstvo \(istorychnyy dosvid ta problema suchasnosti\)\*. Vol. 1 \(Lviv – Rudno: Lviv's'ka Dukhovna Seminariya Svyatoho Dukha, Muzey sakral'noho mystetstva, 2002\), 66.](#)
33. [Jana Božová and František Gutek, \*Drevené kostolíky v okolí Bardejova\* \[Wooden churches in the vicinity of Bardejov\] \(Bardejov: SAJANCY, 1997\), fig. at 150.](#)
34. [Tkáč, \*Ikony zo 16.–19. storočia\*, 81.](#)
35. [See also Romuald Biskupski, "Próba charakterystyki swoistych cech ukraińskiego malarstwa ikonowego od XV do pierwszej połowy XVIII wieku" \[The test of the characteristics of the original guilds of Ukrainian icon painting from the 15th to the first half of the 18th centuries\], in \*Polska–Ukraina 1000 lat sąsiedztwa\*, vol. 5, \*Miejsce i rola Kościoła greckokatolickiego w Kościele powszechnym\*, ed. Stanisław Stępień \(Przemyśl: Południowo-Wschodni Instytut Naukowy, 2000\), 159; Dymytriy \(Yarema\), \*Ikonopys Zakhidnoi Ukrainy\*, 367–78, fig. at 367, 376, 377. R. Biskupski distinguishes four variants of Ukrainian icons of the Mandylion \("O dwu zaginionych szesnastowiecznych ikonach Mandylionu i Narodzenia Matki Boskiej z tserkwi w Królowej Ruskiej" \[About two lost sixteenth-century icons of the Mandylion and the Nativity of the Mother of God from the church in Krolowa Ruska\], in \*Zachodnioukraińska sztuka cerkiewna\* \(Łańcut: Muzeum Zamek w Łańcucie, 2004\), 2:244–45; Jaroslaw](#)

- [Giemza, \*Tserkwie i ikony Łemkowszczyzny\* \[Churches and icons of Lemkowszczyzna\] \(Rzeszów: Libra, 2017\), 418–23.](#)
36. [See \*Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Art\* \(Athens: Ministry of Culture, Byzantine and Christian Museum, Athens, 1985\), fig. 131, 132; Onasch and Schnieper, \*Ikonen\*, 181.](#)
37. [See Wolodymyr Aleksandrowycz, “Malarze południowo-wschodnich terenów prawosławnej diecezji przemyskiej w drugiej połowie XVI wieku” \[Painters of the southeastern lands of the Orthodox Diocese of Przemyśl in the second half of the 16th century\], in \*Sztuka cerkiewna w diecezji przemyskiej: Materiały z międzynarodowej konferencji naukowej 25–26 marca 1995 roku\* \(Łańcut: Muzeum Zamek w Łańcutcie, 1999\), 73–88.](#)
38. [Maria Helytovych, “‘Strashnyi sud’ seredyiny XVI st. peremyslshkoho maliara Oleksiya Horoshkovycha z tserkvy Perenesennia moshchei sv. Mykoły s. Ruska Bystra z Muzeiu ukraińsko-rus’koi kultury v Svydnyku” \[The Last Judgment mid-sixteenth century Przemyśl painter Oleksiy Horoshkovych from the church of the Transfer of the Relics of St. Nicholas. Ruská Bystrá from the Museum of Ukrainian Culture in Svidnik\], \*Pravoslávny teologický zborník\* 22, no. 7 \(1999\): 321–32.](#)
39. [Tkáč, \*Ikony zo 16.–19. storočia\*, 138–47.](#)
40. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, 150, 151.](#)
41. [John-Paul Himka, \*Last Judgment Iconography in the Carpathians\* \(Toronto: University Toronto Press, 2009\). See also his other publications.](#)
42. [On the icons from Dubová, Rovné, and Príkra, see Tkáč, \*Ikony zo 16.–19. storočia\*, 106, 110, 111; Vladislav Grešlík, \*Ikony Šarišského múzea v Bardejove / Icons of the Šariš Museum at Bardejov\* \(Bratislava: Ars Monument, 1994\), 27, 33. The \*klejmos\* are located on three sides, similar to those on Bulgarian icons, or on two sides but not on the whole circumference, as on Russian icons. The only exception is the icon of the Passion of Christ.](#)

Volodymyr Aleksandrovych, “Naydavnisha peremyslshka zhytiyna ikona svyatoho Mykolaya ta yiyi repliky XV–XVI stolit’” [The oldest Przemyśl life icon of St. Nicholas and its replicas of the 15th–16th centuries], in *Kovchek: Naukovyi zbirnyk iz tserkovnoi istorii*, vol. 3

- (Lviv: Instytut Istorii Tserkvy L'vivs'koi Bohoslovs'koi Akademii, 2001), 3:156–81.
43. [Tkáč, \*Ikony zo 16.–19. storočia\*, 124–28.](#)
  44. [See Ján Hudák, \*Patrocíniá na Slovensku \(Súpis a historický vývin\)\* \[Patronages in Slovakia \(Inventory and historical development\)\] \(Bratislava: Umenovedný ústav Slovenskej akadémie vied, 1984\), 252, 253, 333.](#)
  45. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, 113, 292.](#)
  46. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, 147–49, 310–11.](#)
  47. [See Tkáč, \*Ikony zo 16.–19. storočia\*, 172, 180, 182, 184. For Bulgaria, see Paskaleva, \*Die bulgarische Ikone\*, at 181, 183, 185, 187, 193, 197. For Romania, see Corina Nicolescu, \*Icoane vechi românești\*, fig. 34, 35.](#)
  48. [Mykhaylo Pryymych, \*Tserkovnyy zhyvopys Zakarpattya: Stankovyy ta monumental'nyy zhyvopys istorychnoho Zakarpattya do pershoi polovyny XX st.\* \[Church painting of Transcarpathia: Panel and monumental painting of historical Transcarpathia until the first half of the twentieth century.\] \(Uzhhorod: Karpaty, 2017\), 9–18.](#)

## **Part II Contacts and Patronage beyond Borders**

# 8 Framing Silk Patronage in the Late Medieval Eastern Adriatic

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Silk was one of the most desirable luxury products in Western Europe during the late Middle Ages, and only members of the highest social elite could afford expensive silk fabrics. Its value lies in the fact that items made of silk lasted for centuries and were continuously redesigned in order to utilize this expensive material for as long as possible. In society, silk was clearly associated with financial and social status and was used for personal advancement and representation of power. The centers of silk production of the time were located mainly in the Byzantine Empire and in Islamic countries along the Mediterranean Sea, from where the art of silk weaving was introduced to Europe.<sup>1</sup>

For centuries, the Adriatic Sea route was one of the key maritime routes along which silk and other luxury products, such as Eastern spices, were brought to Western Europe. More precisely, the route stretched along the more sailable eastern Adriatic coast (nowadays a part of the Republic of Slovenia, the Republic of Croatia, the Republic of Montenegro, and the Republic of Albania) all the way to Venice and then further toward the West. However, it would be wrong to perceive this area solely as a transit zone for luxury products since it was quite the opposite. Especially during the late Middle Ages, the east coast of the Adriatic was a region of overlapping political, ecclesiastical, and cultural spheres. From the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, the area saw an overlap of interests between powerful political agents: the Republic of Venice, the Kingdom of Hungary and Croatia, the Kingdom of Bosnia, the Republic of Ragusa, the Ottoman Empire, and, finally, the Habsburg Monarchy. Despite this, many coastal towns, such as Osor, Senj, or Zadar (nowadays a part of the Republic of Croatia), which were situated along this important maritime route and were founded during Roman, early medieval, and Byzantine



periods, have prospered, primarily due to the very intense trade between East and West.<sup>2</sup>

Considering the significant economic strength of the eastern Adriatic towns, it comes as no surprise that the members of their social elite could afford the luxury goods that often passed through the towns' ports. The first argument of this essay, based on written sources as well as on the analysis of preserved objects, concerns members of the social elites on the eastern Adriatic coast who were very familiar with contemporary artistic trends in the production centers. The second argument that we discuss in this essay refers to the refined taste of the local elite that was very likely the result of three factors. First, members of prominent families often personally traveled to Mediterranean centers, where they could see and procure luxury silks firsthand. Second, the route along the eastern coast of the Adriatic was continuously serviced by domestic and foreign traders of various goods, including silks. And third—a factor that is often neglected—in addition to luxury products, the Eastern Adriatic coast was often used as a route for members of royal families and their entourage, as well as for other members of the European elite, such as church prelates. The town of Senj, for example, located in the northern Adriatic, was a vital port in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, a site that connected Hungary and the Adriatic traffic routes and that accommodated almost all Hungarian-Croatian kings, from Andrew III (1265–1301) of the Árpád dynasty in 1292 to Sigismund of Luxembourg (1368–1437) in 1425.<sup>3</sup> It can be assumed, therefore, that such royal stays in eastern Adriatic towns influenced the tastes of the local elite, especially when it came to their way of dressing and their use of precious silk.

The first part of the essay examines archival data related to silk commissioning, ownership, and commercial exchange on the eastern coast of the Adriatic, thus providing the broader context for the individual pieces that we analyze in the second part. These pieces are significant examples of commissions that overcame political boundaries, even when the most prominent members of the local elite were involved.

## **Silk Production, Trading, and Possession: Selected Written Sources**

Every Christmas since 1018, representatives of the island of Rab (now part of the Republic of Croatia) paid a tax in silk that was equal to the amount of ten pounds of high-quality silk or half that value in gold to the Venetian Doge since the island was part of Venetian Stato da Màr.<sup>4</sup> Although the source does not specify the center of production or the purpose of this small amount of raw material, it is nevertheless a very valuable testimony about the presence of silk on the eastern coast of the Adriatic in the eleventh century. Clearly, even small quantities of silk were highly valued in Venice due to their very high price and scarcity.<sup>5</sup> However, attempts to establish a silk industry on the eastern Adriatic coast are not recorded in Venetian sources until the sixteenth century and involve efforts to settle silk weavers in Dubrovnik, although it seems that these endeavors were unsuccessful.<sup>6</sup> Based on currently available data, in the observed period, the cultivation and production of silk had not been established, therefore the presence of silk on the eastern Adriatic coast is primarily related to the circulation of completed silk fabrics and raw materials needed for weaving. This is why the central issues discussed here are related to the possession of silk and silk patronage as well as to questions of trade, such as the migrations of merchants and secular and church elites.

Merchants, businessmen, and craftsmen from this period were key figures in cultural interactions in the Mediterranean, and they played a crucial role in both the distribution of silk and in creating new demands, tastes, and trends.<sup>7</sup> However, the trade of these objects in the Mediterranean also influenced a much more complex cultural phenomenon—the exchange of stylistic traits and iconographic solutions.<sup>8</sup> It comes as no surprise that the political and economic ties between West and East, and specifically Venice as the dominant artistic center of production in the Adriatic and the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires, are also reflected in the stylistic vocabulary of the art objects. This is the main reason for the intertwining of Eastern and Western stylistic elements on expensive silk fabrics and embroidery that was created in the late Middle Ages, particularly between

the fourteenth and the sixteenth centuries in Venetian manufactories. According to David Jacoby, Venice followed the Byzantine tradition more than any other weaving center in the West.<sup>9</sup>

Trade in expensive silks on the eastern Adriatic coast has been recorded since the early tenth century.<sup>10</sup> As main ports on the eastern Adriatic sea route, the towns of Senj, Zadar, Split, and Dubrovnik (nowadays part of the Republic of Croatia) were directly open to Venetian trade business with the Byzantine Empire, Islamic countries, and later the Ottoman Empire, as well as to intensive trade contacts with towns on the opposite side of the Adriatic coast. Venetian galleys thus brought to the West various Eastern fabrics, out of which the most desirable for members of the European elite were the expensive patterned Eastern silks called tartar silks or tartar cloths (It. *panni tartarici*). They were produced during the second half of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in the Mongol territories of Central Asia and the Middle East. They were distinctive in their technical characteristics and had a decorative repertoire that contained a combination of Islamic, Central Asian, and Chinese motifs.<sup>11</sup> *Purpure tartarenses* are mentioned on the list of grants of the Hungarian-Croatian king Stephen V (1239–72) to his supporters from 1264. The silks were bought either in Zadar or Venice by a Venetian merchant who had just returned from the Levant.<sup>12</sup>

The silk trade must have been a very popular activity in Zadar in the thirteenth century, as its import was exempt from taxes under a treaty concluded in 1217 by the Hungarian-Croatian king Andrew II (1177–1235) and the Venetian Republic, which was still in force at the time of King Bela IV (1206–70). Hungarian merchants had the same privileges in Venice when doing business at the Fondaco dei Tedeschi.<sup>13</sup> A significant amount of trade in luxury fabrics in Zadar, the most developed eastern Adriatic town at the time, also took place in the fourteenth century. The Zadar statute mentions the import of raw materials from the East as well as the presence of thread manufacturers (It. *filatrice*) and fabric dyers (Lat. *tinctoris*) in the town at that time.<sup>14</sup> In addition to well-developed trade systems, the production of quality draping was a very important branch of Zadar's economy and drapers (Lat. *draparius*) were the most prominent and

richest of the town's merchants in the second half of the fourteenth century.<sup>15</sup>

Among the most successful merchants was the draper Mihovil Petrov, whose wealth is evidenced in an inventory of his holdings, compiled for his will in Zadar in 1385.<sup>16</sup> The extensive list encompasses a large amount of expensive clothing owned by Mihovil and his wife, Filipa, much of which was made of silk. The list mentions silk and velvet robes, fur linings, women's silk rope belts, as well as velvet hats and bags with details embroidered using gold threads and pearls. Among the types of silk used for clothes were *damask*, *cendat*, *cendaline*, *zambeloto*, and *camucha* (*camuce*) with white and crimson details (*cum operibus albis et vermiliis*) and with green circles and flowers on a green background (*camuca viridi ad rotas uirides atque flores*).<sup>17</sup> It was also explicitly mentioned that the Petrovs' clothes were modeled after Florentine, Venetian, Turkish, and Hungarian cuts.<sup>18</sup> The inventory further mentions the origin of the fabrics, namely Alexandria, Damascus, Persia, Verona, Prague, Ultramontane, Florence, Monza, and Zadar. It is, therefore, possible to assume that in addition to drapery, Mihovil was also involved in the trade of silk fabrics, which were apparently well known to his household, and that he and his wife were very familiar with modern trends emerging from the most important production centers. However, as Silvija Banić concludes, the highest quality silk with patterns, such as the expensive *camuche*, could be found only in his wardrobe, not in his shop.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, it is evident that he ordered these lavish products and brought a certain amount to Zadar. This was because expensive silks were almost exclusively custom-made, both during the Middle Ages and in later centuries, and they were bought directly from foreign production centers,<sup>20</sup> although certainly not due to a low demand for this type of expensive silk among the Zadar aristocracy.

We can also learn about the trade and possession of garments made of silk and silk fabrics in Zadar from the inventory of the wealthy Zadar merchant Fumica Salvagnela from 1346. Pieces from both her private collection and the items found in her store make it clear that selling fabrics, especially high-quality ones, was a very important and lucrative business. Fumica had

an enviable amount of quality textile products in her store, including gilded linings, bursa, silk tablecloths, silk ribbons, gilded ornaments (*fisadura d'auoro*), fine silk fabrics (*çindum*), and linens embroidered with gold and silk (*savarschi*). One could also find silks of lower quality as well as raw silk and gold thread in her store.<sup>21</sup>

Active trade during the late Middle Ages also took place in the northern Adriatic towns of Senj and Rijeka (nowadays part of the Republic of Croatia). This is why Senj hosted four consular offices in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, representing the Republic of Dubrovnik, the Republic of Venice, the March of Ancona, and the Principality of Catalonia.<sup>22</sup> Senj regularly supplied Dubrovnik with wood, while fabrics and other items were imported from Dubrovnik to Senj. For example, while in Senj, Dubrovnik merchant Nikola Jurčić had to sell silk fabrics he bought in Venice for forty-eight ducats and use the money to buy wood.<sup>23</sup> Trade connections between Senj and Ancona were very intense during the Middle Ages, despite the Venetian Republic's constant efforts to restrict them. An anonymous Venetian chronicler thus noted that, despite the restriction from 1420, a significant amount of wool and silk fabrics were sent from Ancona to Senj.<sup>24</sup>

## **Silk Patronage in the Fourteenth Century: Some Figural Embroidery Examples**

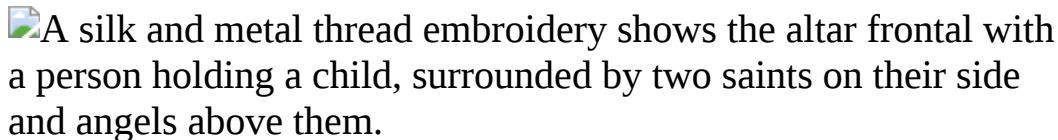
A relatively small number of late medieval silks has been preserved in the area of the eastern Adriatic coast, which can be reliably associated with a particular patron. Based on a series of documents, primarily wills, and church inventories, we know that the number of textile items, including those of silk, was once significantly higher. For example, Pavao II Šubić (ca. 1295–1346), a member of one of the most important Croatian noble families of the counts of Bribir, left in his 1346 will a number of liturgical items to the Franciscan church of St. Mary in Bribir in the hinterland of Šibenik (nowadays a part of the Republic of Croatia). Among the bequested liturgical objects were numerous liturgical vestments, which, like most of the church and its original inventory, was lost during the wars with the

Ottomans during the early modern period.<sup>25</sup> The recently discovered and currently oldest complete inventory of liturgical vessels, vestments, and paraments of the Dubrovnik cathedral of St. Mary the Great was compiled in 1531 and is a particularly valuable document since it testifies to the wealth of probably one of the most luxuriously furnished churches on the eastern coast of the Adriatic, before the catastrophic earthquake that struck Dubrovnik in 1667. Among the numerous liturgical fabric items were as many as twenty-three altar frontals, of which at least fifteen were made of silk.<sup>26</sup>

The series of unfortunate historical events that befell the towns on the eastern coast of the Adriatic over the centuries, including wars, earthquakes, and fires, led to significant losses of artistic heritage and thus the textile fund. A certain lower number of extant textiles from the late medieval time is related to the context of sacred relics, either found inside reliquaries as part of the content or lining or else worshiped as secondary relics.<sup>27</sup> A very valuable example of this type is the gremial veil placed in the chest of Saint Simeon (made between 1377 and 1380) in Zadar.<sup>28</sup> According to the inscription on the gremial made of pearls, it is a donation from “*GEORGIE DESPOT.*”<sup>29</sup> Although it is still uncertain which Serbian ruler from the Branković dynasty this references—namely, Đurađ Smederevski (1377–1456) or his grandson Đorđe Maksim (1461–1516)—the gremial is, in any case, an extremely valuable example of a preserved royal textile donation.<sup>30</sup> Despite a series of local legends, mostly unconfirmed by evidence, about the royal donations of textile items—such as those of the Hungarian-Croatian queen Elizabeta Kotromanić (ca. 1339–87) during the fourteenth century or the Bosnian queen Katarina Kosača Kotromanić (1425–78) in the fifteenth century, the number of documented examples or registered donors of textile items is very low.<sup>31</sup>

Another exceptional example of this type has been preserved in Zadar, an altar frontal, part of the Permanent Exhibition of Sacred Art. The well-known altar frontal made of red silk was originally made for the church of the famous Benedictine women's monastery of St. Mary in Zadar ([Figure 8.1](#)). The inscription “*PRESBITER RADONVS*” is embroidered next to the depiction of the kneeling donor, so there is no doubt that the silk is a

donation from the priest Radonja. In 1337, Radonja commissioned the altar of St. John for the church of St. Mary, and he composed his will in 1349. Therefore, the thesis that the altar frontal was created around 1340 seems acceptable, and considering the images of St. John the Evangelist and St. John the Baptist, it was most likely placed right in front of the newly erected altar.<sup>32</sup>

A silk and metal thread embroidery shows the altar frontal with a person holding a child, surrounded by two saints on their side and angels above them.

[Figure 8.1 Altar Frontal with a detail of the donor priest Radonja, silk and metal thread embroidery, ca. 1340, Permanent Exhibition of Sacred Art, Zadar.](#)

*Source:* Natalija Vasić; courtesy of the Croatian Conservation Institute, Zagreb.

In the fourteenth century, another red silk altar frontal with an embroidered depiction of the kneeling donor was made for the churches of Zadar, and it has been preserved to date. This altar frontal is kept in the Museum of Applied Arts in Budapest, and it was originally commissioned for the church of the male Benedictine monastery of St. Chrysogonus, most probably for one of the altars dedicated to the town's patron, St.

Chrysogonus, in the southern apse.<sup>33</sup> It seems plausible that this was the donation of the abbot John de Oncieu, originally from the diocese of Lyon, who was the head of Zadar Monastery from 1345 to 1377. Based on stylistic and iconographic analyses, the frontal was likely created after the plague, as well as after the Peace of Zadar in 1358, while the *terminus ante quem* is 1377, the last year Abbot John spent as head of the monastery.<sup>34</sup>

It should be noted that there is a quite high number of known—or, at least, assumed with relative certainty—patrons of silk items in the fourteenth century compared to the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, when there are significantly more items whose patrons are not known. These fourteenth-century liturgical items are adorned with embroidery and are generally attributed to Venetian manufactories. Systematic research of this

group of items and the analysis of their patrons has not been conducted so far.

A particularly valuable work of art is the altar frontal housed at the Victoria and Albert Museum, originally from the cathedral of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Krk. It is a masterpiece of medieval embroidery, made after a preparatory drawing of Paolo Veneziano (ca. 1290 to 1358–62).<sup>35</sup> It was presumably created in the sixth decade of the fourteenth century as a commission made by Bishop John II (before 1358–89), who is shown on the altar frontal in the typical pose of a kneeling donor, and it is probably a donation of the counts of Krk, possibly the then-powerful count John V (before 1343–93).<sup>36</sup>

In the Permanent Exhibition of Sacred Art in Zadar, besides the altar frontal of Priest Radonja, there are eight more silk fragments decorated with embroidered series of saints, which are believed to have originally been part of the mentioned altar frontal ([Figure 8.2](#)).<sup>37</sup> However, we assert here, for the first time, that these pieces may have originally been the decorations of dalmatics, which would make these fragments potentially even more valuable from a typological point of view. More precisely, eight fragments would originally decorate a pair of dalmatics, four on each dalmatic, probably two on the front and two on the back. A similarity was already observed in the design of the depiction of the saints on the eight patches kept in the treasury of St. Mark's Cathedral in Korčula.<sup>38</sup> The embroidered saints from Korčula date back to the second half of the fourteenth century and were subsequently, probably in the sixteenth century, sewn onto two red velvet dalmatics.<sup>39</sup> It is, however, plausible that the depictions of saints did not change their original function. The stylistic and technical characteristics of the Zadar fragments indeed show certain similarities with the fragments from Korčula as well as with the altar frontal in Budapest, originally also from the Zadar church and dated between 1358 and 1377. In light of this, it can also be assumed that the eight fragments from Zadar were made in the second half of the fourteenth century, maybe during the episcopate of Archbishop Dominic between 1368 and 1376. Archbishop Dominic was born at the beginning of the fourteenth century in Durrës (nowadays part of the Republic of Albania) into the Tobia (Thopia) family.



He was schooled on the Apennine peninsula and belonged to the Dominican order. It is particularly interesting and possibly indicative that from 1350 to 1368, immediately before assuming the role of the archbishop of Zadar, he was the bishop in Korčula. He died in Đakovo in 1382.<sup>40</sup>

A textile with dense decoration including both figures and floreal patterns

[Figure 8.2 Fragments of dalmatics, silk, and metal thread embroidery, fourteenth century, Permanent Exhibition of Sacred Art, Zadar.](#)

*Source:* Živko Bačić, Photo Library of Permanent Exhibition of Sacred Art, Zadar.

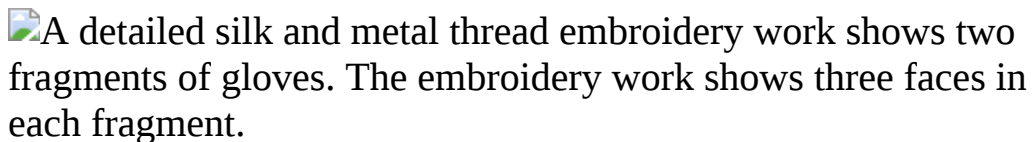
From a typological point of view, two other valuable silk items are kept in Dalmatian treasuries, and we can make assumptions about their patronage. In 1370, Trogir Bishop Nikola Casotti (before 1320–71), a member of a distinguished local patrician family, drew up a will that left his crosier and mitre, among other items, to the cathedral of St. Lawrence in Trogir. The mitre is preserved to this day, made of red silk and adorned with pearls, gems, and medallions with painted miniatures and embroidered depictions of saints ([Figure 8.3](#)). If the mitre was made for Bishop Nikola, according to the years of his episcopacy and the mentioned will, it should be dated between 1362 and 1370. It should, however, be noted that the mitre is a pastiche, with some of its elements obviously not originally made for it and reused here; therefore the question of the individual elements' dating remains open.<sup>41</sup>

A detailed silk and metal thread embroidery work on a mitre.

[Figure 8.3 Mitre, silk and metal thread embroidery, fourteenth century, Treasury of the cathedral of St. Lawrence, Trogir.](#)

*Source:* Danijel Ciković; courtesy of Treasury of the cathedral of St. Lawrence, Trogir.

The last examples we can mention are the smallest but perhaps the most interesting: the extremely rare fragments of bishop's gloves that are kept in the Treasury of the cathedral of St. Domnius in Split ([Figure 8.4](#)). Two fragments are made of silk and decorated with three embroidered medallions, each with a depiction of a saint. The fragments were found in the sarcophagus of Archbishop Lawrence (1059–99), and based on stylistic, iconographic, and contextual analysis, it is likely that the gloves were made for Archbishop Balian, apparently the only documented archbishop of Split buried in the cathedral in the fourteenth century.<sup>42</sup> Archbishop Balian was originally Greek, born in Beirut in the middle of the thirteenth century. He fled, along with the crusaders, from the Holy Land to Cyprus in the late thirteenth century, after which he was ordained as the archbishop of Rhodes. Pope John XXII (ca. 1244–1334) appointed him archbishop of Split in 1324, where he remained until his death in 1328.<sup>43</sup>

A detailed silk and metal thread embroidery work shows two fragments of gloves. The embroidery work shows three faces in each fragment.

[Figure 8.4 Fragments of gloves, silk and metal thread embroidery, fourteenth century, Treasury of the cathedral of St. Domnius, Split.](#)

*Source:* Danijel Ciković; courtesy of Treasury of the cathedral of St. Domnius, Split.

## Conclusion

During the late Middle Ages, silk fabrics, often decorated with embroidered motifs made with threads of precious metals, were among the most significant symbols of exceptional luxury and indicators of elevated social status. The production of such expensive items was a very complex process and was linked exclusively to the most developed European centers. Therefore, it is not surprising that no traces of such production have been discovered thus far in any of the towns on the eastern coast of the Adriatic. Regardless of this and the fact that the textile fund experienced significant

losses during the modern era, the preserved items that were originally made specifically for patrons along the Eastern Adriatic allow us to draw certain conclusions and contribute to the better knowledge of textile culture in the period.

The stylistic and technical characteristics of the objects bear witness, first, to the sophisticated tastes of patrons who, directly or indirectly, were familiar with contemporary artistic trends and production standards in the most developed production centers. Second, the relatively large number of these expensive items indicates significant financial power and a relatively large number of members of the social elite, which is fully in line with the picture of the then-prosperous and dynamic area of the eastern coast of the Adriatic. Also, a closer analysis of the structure of the patrons leads to the conclusion that these persons carried out different ecclesiastical functions, belonged to different social classes, and were of various origins and ethnicities. Undoubtedly, donations of such luxurious works of art contributed to the self-promotion of the commissioners within their respective local communities. Finally, a significant number of these items was made in Venetian workshops, which indicates that patrons along the Adriatic, regardless of their political affiliation at the time of the commission (which changed very often in this region), were oriented toward Venice, the artistic metropolis of the Adriatic since the fourteenth century at the latest. The characteristics of these silk items mirror, to a considerable extent, the works of Byzantine and later Ottoman masters from Constantinople. Connoisseurship of these liturgical objects is in its initial phase; besides mapping, a systematic technical analysis is needed, as well as contextualization within the framework of wider patronage and production of luxurious artworks in the period.

## Notes

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2. Among numerous studies on the topic, the recent one by Trpimir Vedriša regarding the most important late medieval town on the eastern coast of the Adriatic—Zadar—stands out: Trpimir Vedriš, “Heir of Roman Dalmatia or a Stillborn Child of Byzantine Early Medieval Adriatic Policy?,” in *Byzantium, Venice and the Medieval Adriatic: Spheres of Maritime Power and Influence, c. 700–1453*, ed. Magdalena Skoblar (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 133–72.
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- Decorative Techniques from East to Europe*, ed. Beata Biedrońska-Słota and Aleksandra Görlich (Warsaw-Torun: Polish Institute of World Art Studies and Tako, 2016), 119–31, at 119, 120.
9. Jacoby, “Silk Economics and Cross-Cultural Artistic Interaction,” 229.
  10. Magdalena Skoblar, “Beast from the East: The Griffin's Journey to Dalmatian Eleventh-Century Sculpture,” in *Aspice Hunc Opus Mirum: Festschrift on the Occasion of Nikola Jakšić's 70th Birthday*, eds. Ivan Josipović and Miljenko Jurković (Zagreb: IRCLAMA, University of Zagreb, Croatia and University of Zadar, 2020), 293–304, at 297–98.
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  12. Jacoby, “Oriental Silks at the Time of the Mongols,” 95.
  13. Jacoby, “Silk Economics and Cross-Cultural Artistic Interaction,” 232.
  14. Sabine Florence Fabijanec, “Dva trgovačka inventara kao pokazatelji ekonomskog i kulturnog života u Zadru u XIV. Stoljeću” [Two trade inventories as indicators of economic and cultural life in Zadar in the fourteenth century], *Povijesni prilozi* 25 (2003): 93–129, at 97, 100.
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  21. Fabijanec, “Dva trgovačka inventara,” 98–100.
  22. Bogumil Hrabak, “Regionalna i međunarodna trgovina Mlečana i Dubrovčana drvetom iz Senja (XIV–XVIII stoljeće)” [Regional and international trade of wood from Senj between Venice and Dubrovnik (fourteenth to eighteenth centuries)], *Radovi Zavoda za hrvatsku povijest Filozofskog fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu* 24, no. 1 (1991): 57–107, at 68.
  23. Note: Ibid., 80.
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34. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, 85–86.](#)
35. [Valentina Baradel, “Diramazioni adriatiche di botteghe veneziane: L'isola di Veglia \(Krk\) da Paolo Veneziano a Jacobello del Fiore,” in \*La Serenissima via mare: Arte e cultura tra Venezia e il Quarnaro\*, eds. Valentina Baradel and Cristina Guarnieri \(Padova: Padova University Press, 2019\), 57–75, at 70–72.](#)
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37. Banić, “Zadarski gotički vezeni antependij,” 82–83.
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# 9

## A RULER AND A CHURCHMAN Collaborative Patronage of Monasteries in Medieval Serbia

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Serbian scholars have long paid particular attention to royal patronage of church institutions in the Balkans, Byzantium, Mount Athos, and the Holy Land. In particular, studies of royal patronage underlined the importance that the Nemanjići (1165–66 to 1371) and Lazarevići (1371–1427) dynasties attached to the sponsorship of great monastic foundations (*zadužbine*) as one of their royal policies. This activity was regarded as a means to establish political influence on a territory, shape the ideology of power via images and donation charters, and ensure the symphony of lay and ecclesiastic powers in the Kingdom of Serbia.<sup>1</sup> The Serbian kings started to engage in monastic patronage to imitate their Byzantine imperial counterparts, but as soon as they realized the political and administrative potential of ecclesiastic foundations, the Serbian elites established a more profound affiliation between religious institutions and the ruling dynasty.<sup>2</sup> Trespassing the borders of legally allowed interventions into Church affairs,

they developed a system of collaborative patronage over autonomous monasteries that involved both kings and (arch)bishops as the monasteries' cofounders, and they simultaneously assigned the role of royal political advisors to the *hegoumenoi* and highest clergy.

However, the Byzantine legal principles that structured and guided Serbian ecclesiastic and monastic life foresaw the superiority of local bishops over the decisions of lay sponsors in the matters of foundation and management of monasteries. Following the grand narrative that claimed the decisive role played by the dynastic sanctity, royal patronage, and the Church-state symphony in the creation and development of the Serbian (Raška) Kingdom, scholarship has systematically underestimated the political influence of Church hierarchies and, more precisely, that of local bishops.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, this chapter proposes to take a closer look at the solutions invented by Serbian royal patrons to conform to this originally Byzantine legal framework and, simultaneously, to promote their ideological and political agendas via monastic patronage. I will first examine how the Serbian Church accommodated Byzantine ecclesiastical laws and traditions and adopted the practice of independent monasteries for the needs of royal policies. Turning to the relationship that developed between Serbian rulers and archbishops in the second half of the thirteenth century, I will further regard the joint participation of kings and bishops in the foundation of royal monasteries as a unique local strategy that arose in response to the use of Byzantine ecclesiastic and imperial regulations in the Kingdom of Serbia.

In Byzantium, the legislative processes involved both secular and ecclesiastic officials, namely emperors as well as church councils could pass laws regulating various social issues. However, when applied to particular cases, these laws were treated rather as guidelines, combined with customs, common sense, and the principle of lesser harm.<sup>4</sup> In these circumstances, the Byzantine administrators, whether secular or ecclesiastic, could adapt the laws to their needs but not violate them. With the translation of Byzantine legislation into Slavic language, Bulgaria, Rus', and Serbia received sets of civil and canon laws that were subsequently supplemented with local norms in the royal legal collections, such as the

Russkaya Pravda (eleventh century) or Tsar Dušan's Code (fourteenth century).<sup>5</sup>

### **Byzantine Ecclesiastic Laws in Serbia: *Nomokanon***

The person responsible for the transfer of Byzantine legal theories and practices was Rastko-Sava Nemanjić (1175–1236), the younger son of the Serbian ruler Stefan-Simeon Nemanja (r. 1165–66 to 1199), the first Archbishop of Serbia and its patron saint after his death in 1236.<sup>6</sup> Sava single-handedly created the ecclesiastic hierarchy of the Serbian Church (receiving its independence from the Archbishopric of Ohrid in 1219), organized the canonization of his father as the first dynastic saint, and conceived the architecture of the relations between the state headed by the Nemanjići family and the Slavic-speaking Orthodox Church.<sup>7</sup> Sava transplanted to Serbian soil both the Byzantine laws provisioning the subjection of monasteries to bishops and the legal practices that provided the mechanisms to exempt some monasteries from the episcopal authority, such as ktetorial typika. Perhaps, the main reason for such contradictory policies lies in an attempt to legitimate Serbian state and ecclesiastic sovereignty in the first decades of the thirteenth century.

Between 1207 (when St. Simeon Nemanja's relics were translated from the Athonite monastery of Hilandar to Studenica in Serbia) and 1217 (the year of Stefan Nemanjić's coronation as the King of Raška), the offspring of the grand *župan* Nemanja explored strategies to effect de jure the independence of the de facto existing Serbian state.<sup>8</sup> Simultaneously, Sava looked for the possibility of emancipating his Slavic-speaking flock from the authority of the Greek Ohrid archbishopric.<sup>9</sup> In the circumstances of the post-1204 world, where the Byzantine Empire was succeeded by the smaller regional Greek states, the careful balancing between Nicaea, Epirus, and the Latins enabled the Nemanjići to create independent ecclesiastic and administrative institutions.<sup>10</sup> Exactly in this period, the notion of the royal self-governing monasteries appeared in local social practice as a remedy against Ohrid's power and a tool for creating an alliance between Serbian Church organizations and the ruling dynasty.<sup>11</sup> Though distinguished with Slavic-Greek diglossia, in the twelfth century, the Archbishopric of Ohrid

was a vehicle of Byzantine imperial politics in the Balkans and, when the Despotate of Epiros emerged in the aftermath of 1204, the Ohrid see served the religious and political aims of the Greek Balkan principality.<sup>12</sup> To counterbalance this religious authority, the Serbian independent monasteries would be headed by a confidant of the king and receive autonomy from local bishops, which were often appointed by, or in agreement with, the Ohrid Archbishop. With the passage of time, these monastic institutions acquired great popularity among the Nemanjići and drove the lasting collaboration between the kings and the church hierarchs.

In medieval Serbia, a prospective founder organized his or her monastery within the Byzantine legal tradition. The majority of the normative texts as well as the *typika* related to the legal practice were translated from Greek and, thus, reflected the Byzantine social, economic, and legal framework.<sup>13</sup> The donation charters written by Serbian benefactors generally followed the Greek protocol.<sup>14</sup> The liturgical and commemorative rituals largely preserved the Constantinopolitan component.<sup>15</sup> Still, the Serbian practice differed significantly, primarily in the sovereigns' role in the monastic establishment and the exemption of many royal monasteries from bishopric jurisdiction.

The most authoritative collection of legal texts in the medieval Serbian Kingdom was the so-called *Nomokanon* that St. Sava ordered to be translated ca. 1219.<sup>16</sup> The compilation of sixty-four chapters, of which forty-four have canonical content and twenty secular, borrowed predominantly from two Greek canonical corpuses, the *Synopsis* of Stephen of Ephesus, with commentaries by Alexios Aristinos, and the *Nomokanon of the Fourteen Titles*, belonging to an unknown author of the seventh century, with interpretations by John Zonaras. The secular regulations of the Serbian *Nomokanon* included excerpts from Emperor Justinian's *novella* of eighty-seven titles edited by John Scholastikos, the *Prochiron* by Basil I, and three *novellae* by Emperor Alexios Komnenos.<sup>17</sup> This collection incorporated provisions regulating the relations between monastery founders and ecclesiastic authorities. Namely, the eleventh chapter of the *Nomokanon of the Fourteen Titles* explicitly reinforced regulations 4 and 24 of the Chalcedon Council (451) stating that no founder can make a monastery without the consent and approval of the local bishop heading this

church jurisdiction (Canon 4) and that dedication of lands, buildings, and properties to a monastery is irreversible (Canon 24).<sup>18</sup> Thus:

No one shall build a monastery without the bishop's decree, but the bishop should know and perform the prayer. And, the monastery created and everything belonging to it, inside and outside of it, should be written down in a document and should be under the authority of the bishop. And, without the consent of the bishop, a founder cannot make himself an abbot nor establish another person as an abbot.<sup>19</sup>

This way, the law directly limited laymen's initiatives in respect to monastic organization, management, and crucial administrative appointments. Formally, no decision can be taken without the bishop's consent and his direct legal and ritual involvement. On the other hand, the same legislation restricted the bishops' rights in the monastery foundation:

No one of the bishops shall be permitted to build a special monastery for himself to the destitution and detriment of his own bishopric. If anyone dares to do so, he shall be punished with the prohibition [to serve], while the monastery he has erected shall be reassigned to the bishopric as a simple laic habitat.<sup>20</sup>

This way, bishops could not become monastic founders, they could not establish a monastery as a place to retire, and they could not be buried and commemorated as private individuals. Simultaneously, as ecclesiastic hierarchs, they were responsible for the supervision and administration of numerous private religious foundations established by laymen in their jurisdictions.

This parity of rights and obligations on both parties ensured a collaboration between economically potent private persons and the local ecclesiastic administration. However, the Serbian translation of the *Nomokanon* appeared in the time when the authority of local Byzantine church hierarchs was undermined by the conquests of the Fourth Crusade, whereas the monastic founders actively strove for the independent status of their institutions using such legal instruments as *stauropegia* (monasteries

not under the control of the local bishop) and imperial grants of monastic autonomy.<sup>21</sup>

## **Byzantine Legal Practices in Serbia: Independent Monasteries**

The Byzantine tendency for independent foundations also affected relations between the monastic founders and bishops in Serbia, primarily on the side of legal practice. St. Sava authored the very first local *typika* (those for Hilandar, Studenica, and Karyes monasteries), creating them as adaptations of the famous Evergetis text, which was the direct model for the majority of Byzantine independent foundations.<sup>22</sup>

In the beginning, Serbian monastic establishments followed the Byzantine monastic autonomous pattern. More precisely, Hilandar and Studenica, organized and administered by Sava himself, received the *typika* underlining their special status, which was above the jurisdiction of the local ecclesiastic hierarchs.<sup>23</sup> Initially renewed as a dependency of Vatopedi, in 1198, the monastery of Hilandar became the sovereign Serbian institution on the territory of Athos by the initiative of Sava and his elderly father, Simeon Nemanja.<sup>24</sup> As a revered monk and son of the Serbian ruler, Sava used both his spiritual authority on the Holy Mount and his family connections to the Byzantine Emperor Alexios III (r. 1195–1203), to secure Hilandar's independence with the official imperial documents.<sup>25</sup> The chrysobull given by Alexios III Angelos on the demand of Simeon Nemanja and Sava in 1198 exempted the establishment from the authority of Vatopedi and turned it into an autonomous and self-governing institution destined for the subjects of the Serbian state:

[My majesty] appoints these monasteries to be free in everything, i.e., that of Hilandar as well as those in the place called of Mileon, and places them under the authority and administration of those many times mentioned monks, *kyr* Symeon, called the great *župan*, and his son *kyr* Sava, and [gives] them freedom to dispose it as they want ... and to transform it into a so-called shelter for those committed to monasticism and originating from the Serbian nation, that would not be a subject to anybody, nor the *protos* of the Mount of Athos, nor the

*hegoumenos* of Vatopedi Monastery, but it would be called independent and free and self-governing, in the same manner as the monastery of Georgians and that of Amalfitans.<sup>26</sup>

Consequently, this right for self-government was attested by the Typikon of Hilandar that Sava translated from Greek and adopted to the needs of his foundation ca. 1199.<sup>27</sup> It claimed, in a similar way to its Evergetis predecessor, that the foundation should be “free from all the authorities, from the *protos* and from other monasteries, and from various bishops. And, it should not be included as a part of somebody's rights, neither royal, nor ecclesiastical, nor anyone else's.”<sup>28</sup>

The later Typikon of Studenica, written by St. Sava ca. 1210, repeated the statement on the independence and autonomy of the institution, perhaps preventing possible future claims of the Ohrid archbishopric. It further accorded the decision-making roles to the *hegoumenos* and any ruling Serbian sovereign who should be ultimately respected as equal to the first founder, i.e., Simeon-Stefan Nemanja.<sup>29</sup> Besides the statement concerning the freedom of the foundation from any bishops, similar to that of the Hilandar Typikon, the Serbian version explicitly places Studenica's leadership “above all *hegoumenoi*.” In the chapter on the election of the monastery's superior, the described procedure reflects the distribution of authority between the Serbian ruler, the local bishop, heads of other monasteries, and the members of the Studenica brotherhood.

When the need to install a new *hegoumenos* occurs, the administrative body of the monastery (the *oikonomos*, the *ekklesiarchos*, and the elders) addresses the “autocrat lord of the all Serbian land” who should take with him “the bishop and the *hegoumenoi* of St. George in Ras, the Holy Virgin Gradačka, St. Nicholas in Toplica, St. Nicholas Dabarski, and St. George Dabarski” and arrive to Studenica.<sup>30</sup> Here the ruler, together with the monastery administration, elects the *hegoumenos*, whereas the Raška Bishop, assisted by other *hegoumenoi*, performs the church rituals necessary for the appointment (he clothes the candidate, blesses him, and coserves in the first liturgy). Nevertheless, the ruler concludes the ritual actions, investing the *hegoumenos* with a staff, escorting him to the seat of honor, and pronouncing him with the final “worthy.”<sup>31</sup> This procedure

visually depicts the division of authority between the ruler and the bishops in the royal monasteries: the ruler participates in election decision-making, together with the administrative body of the monastery, and he participates in the installation ritual; the bishop only takes part in the appointment rite. Thus, the ritual prerogatives of the bishop are in place, but he is not involved in the foundation management. In Byzantine royal and aristocratic monasteries, the founders also influenced the superiors' elections, at least the very first one; however, they did not participate in the installation ritual, which was conducted solely by a bishop or metropolitan.<sup>32</sup>

A foundation organized according to the Byzantine model of royal monasteries could appear in Serbia even before the Nemanjići's arrangement of Studenica's administration. It is highly likely that after Stefan Nemanja's negotiations with Manuel I (r. 1143–80), his foundation of St. Nicholas in Toplica received royal privileges from the Byzantine emperor, but it could nevertheless embrace a different administrative model than the Evergetis-based one promoted by St. Sava.<sup>33</sup>

### **Royal Monasteries in Serbia and the Concept of Symphony**

Royal monasteries were, for the first time, listed as special ecclesiastic institutions in the Second Foundation Charter for the monastery of Žiča (1221–24), which was the first official seat of the Serbian Archbishopric.<sup>34</sup> The charter defined the status of four monasteries (Studenica, Đurđevi Stupovi, Hilandar, and the Holy Virgin Gradačka):

The bishops have no authority over these four [monasteries] and neither over their villages situated on the diocesan territories belong to those; and as for the appointment of priests in these areas owned by the monasteries and their spiritual guidance, I pass all these matters to the archbishop. As for the appointment of the superior, which rightfully belongs to the kingship, the archbishop should bless him in a divine manner, whereas the king should give him the stuff and install him as the *hegoumenos* with a kiss.<sup>35</sup>



This way, there were several rich and powerful ecclesiastic institutions where Serbian kings established their direct authority agreed upon by the archbishops. For how long could this agreement last? When in 1220, St. Sava, already heading the independent autocephalous Church, distributed bishoprics in Serbia, he provided the newly established hierarchs with “legal books”—presumably copies of the *Nomokanon*. He ordered the hierarchs to govern their flock “according to the new law of Christ and the tradition of the holy apostles,” the same law that foresaw the superiority of bishops over the lay founders.<sup>36</sup> A solution to this seeming contradiction was invented in the further sanctification of the ruling dynasty to which both literary and visual sources attest in the thirteenth century and in the deeper involvement of ecclesiastic persons in the affairs of the state.<sup>37</sup> The structures of the state represented by the authority of the ruling dynasty and Church institutions became intertwined and interdependent in the entangled system of governance.

St. Sava, i.e., the first head of the Church, started to be perceived as one of the ancestors of the ruling family, and his canonization and further veneration were developed in the framework of dynastic sanctity.<sup>38</sup> When, after the 1263 retirement of St. Sava's protégé, Archbishop Arsenije, the brothers Archbishop Sava II and King Stefan Uroš I headed both the Serbian Church and state, the dynastic component penetrated the ecclesiastical foundations yet further.<sup>39</sup> Even later, when Serbian Church hierarchs could originate outside the ruling dynasty, the rhetoric of fraternity persisted in the imagery of the relations between ruler and churchman. In the ca. 1324 *Life of King Milutin*, the king prayed to receive a spiritual instructor and personal advisor from the clergy ranks: “Give me, your servant, a holy and righteous man after my heart who would instruct me to comprehend the fear of You in my heart completely.”<sup>40</sup> In the biography, Milutin likened his future relationship with an ecclesiastic confidant to St. Barlaam and Prince Joasaph; he also brought up fraternal comparisons remembering the brotherhood ties between St. Sava and Stefan the First-Crowned and between Sava II and King Stefan Uroš:

As You gave a consanguine brother, the *archpriest* of the Serbian land, *kyr* Sava to my holy lord and ancestor, the First-crowned King

Stefan ... And, in the same way, Lord, by Your mercy, You bestowed a consanguine brother holding Your holy seat to my father who was instructed in the spiritual rules, so that they both received the Heavenly Kingdom. So, give me, Lord, according to Your mercy and my request, a man who pleases you, that he would be a brother for me from You, and the *archpriest*, and the instructor of my soul.<sup>41</sup>

This way, the Serbian Church and state were represented as two branches of power implementing the same divine will.<sup>42</sup> Bound to each other in absolute concord as family members, one branch would teach divine providence to the other, which would put it into action. Such a relationship between royal and ecclesiastic powers was quite unique among Eastern Christian societies, where church hierarchs pursued their own independent policies, often in opposition to the royal authority.

Subsequently, a new pattern of collaborative relationships developed for royal monasteries: rulers provided the funds necessary for their construction and endowed them with lands and rights, whereas the churchmen, appointed as cofounders, managed the construction, assembled the communities, and established the rules of everyday life. These collaborative relationships emerged for the first time during the rule of Stefan Uroš I (1243–76). He invited Archbishop Joanikije I (in office 1272–79) to supervise the construction and adornment of his monastic foundation at Sopoćani. The monastery, built and decorated between 1265 and 1276, was intended as a mausoleum for the king and his assisting bishop since their sarcophagi were prepared in the northwestern and southwestern corners of the naos.<sup>43</sup> Though Stefan Uroš had a brother who was Archbishop Sava II (in office 1263–71), the latter's body was buried in the monastery of Peć, the traditional burial place for the leaders of the Serbian Church.<sup>44</sup> This way, the assistant bishop of Sopoćani could be only Archbishop Joanikije who openly expressed his support for King Stefan Uroš during the intergenerational conflict of 1276, causing King Dragutin to subject his burial portrait to *damnatio memoriae*.<sup>45</sup> The Vita of the archbishop clearly states that Joanikije, after the coup, followed Stefan Uroš in exile:

Uroš seeing that he was dethroned from his royal seat rose to go to the land of Hum where he found the end of his life. And, this most revered Joanikije remembering sincere love of that one [Uroš] and the given promise that he would not abandon [the king] until his death, left the holy throne and rose to follow him [the king] and lived there.<sup>46</sup>

Moreover, the model of collaboration between the heads of the Church and state in the case of this royal monastery could truly follow the model of the first Serbian royal monastic establishment. Archbishop Joanikije, whom the king “loved much” like a brother, had been the superior of the royal Studenica Monastery before his election to the archbishopric seat.<sup>47</sup> This background established the amicable and loyal relations between the king and archbishop that allowed for the further development of the royal monastery under their joint patronage.

As supportive evidence of royal-archbishopric cooperation, the Memorial book of Sopoćani attests to another founder in the monastery's history. The manuscript lists various donors and sponsors of the institution, mentioning King Stefan Uroš not simply as “the founder” but as “the first founder,” thus assuming the existence of another person who was the second *ktetor*.<sup>48</sup>

The superiors of the royal monasteries, in turn, also participated in political life, further entangling affairs of Church and state. They not only administered special rituals for the ruling monastery founders but also became members of the state councils that assembled to decide on important political matters and to appoint rulers' successors.<sup>49</sup> In this sense, the political importance of the royal superiors was similar to that of the bishops, though usually they were listed after the bishops, giving them a slightly lower status.

### **Protégé Bishops as Cofounders of Royal Monasteries**

Closely aligned to the ruling family and personally loyal to its members, royal *hegoumenoi* and bishops promoted by kings could help them achieve political goals and mediate conflicts. Thus, King Stefan Uroš II Milutin (r. 1282–1321) summoned the future archbishop Danilo II, then the ex-

superior of Hilandar, to come to Serbia when the king's brother Dragutin laid claims to the throne around 1310.<sup>50</sup> According to narrations by Danilo II and his continuator, Milutin's Church policies became quite unconventional in these matters: he was royal but a layman, and he directly interfered in the affairs of the Church and arranged for the creation of the Bishopric of Banjska for his protégé.<sup>51</sup> In Byzantium, emperors could nominate and even appoint bishops, but the use of this right led to a strong opposition within the Church and was therefore rarely used.<sup>52</sup> Placed by his king into the position of Bishop of Banjska, Danilo not only took care of the state treasure temporarily kept in the monastery but also supervised the construction and decoration of the new church and other related buildings:

Because he received the esteemed order from the pious and God-loving King Stefan Uroš to take care about the completion of that church [Banjska Monastery] and supply the things necessary to raise and arrange the artistic beauties of that holy building, all things were done according to that command.<sup>53</sup>

The text further describes Danilo as a skillful administrator and architectural project manager who

had a strong and supreme wisdom in his heart for the church construction in order to instruct the artists and carefully chosen expert builders on how to establish pillars and capitals, arched vaults and church barriers. Because of his commandment and wisdom, given to him by the Lord, the old building of that church was destroyed, and the new one erected from the foundation and completed, in the image of the Holy Mother of God of Studenica.<sup>54</sup>

Officially, Danilo, as the Bishop of Banjska, invested efforts into the construction of the bishopric seat for his own eparchy. However, the text makes clear that Banjska was conceptualized as a royal monastery from the outset. First, the royal monastery of Studenica was its prototype, and, second, Banjska was intended for the burial of its real founder, King Milutin, and for his posthumous commemoration—“for the burial and rest

of his blessed and God-pleasing body, after his departure from this vain world to Christ.”<sup>55</sup> Indeed, immediately after Danilo's departure to the Holy Mount in 1315, the monastery changed its status from the bishopric seat into a royal monastery, as Danilo's Vita witnesses: “After the departure of my lord [Danilo], the pious king ordered to call this place an *hegoumenia* [an independent monastery].”<sup>56</sup>

The St. Stephen's Charter that King Milutin issued for Banjska in 1315–6 does not mention its bishopric status at all but, rather, insists that the foundation should not be “an archbishopric, or a metropolia, or a bishopric, but only the *hegoumenia* for the cohabitation of monks.”<sup>57</sup> Moreover, the head of Banjska was ranked in fourth place among the royal superiors, preceded only by the abbots of the older royal mausoleums (Studenica, Mileševa, and Sopoćani).<sup>58</sup> This way, abusing his authority and extending it beyond state matters, King Milutin established a precedent for appointing his protégé bishop as a cofounder of a royal foundation, which he then simply converted from a bishopric into an autonomous monastery after its completion.

Later, Milutin's son, Stefan Uroš III of Dečani (r. 1322–31), followed this precedent when he appointed the same Danilo (who was already in the position of archbishop) to supervise the construction of Dečani Monastery from 1327 to 1334.<sup>59</sup> However, the king formally called this archbishop's joint participation in the monastery foundation a “blessing,” exactly the same word that was used in the *Nomokanon* for describing the bishop's approval of a layman's monastery.<sup>60</sup> In the Dečani Foundation Charter, Stefan Uroš III gave the superior of his royal monastery an even higher place in the ecclesiastic hierarchy, above the superiors of all royal institutions and immediately after the archbishop.<sup>61</sup>

## Conclusion

With the military expansion of the Serbian state under Stefan Dušan (r. 1331–55) and the creation of the Serbian patriarchate in 1346, the structure of relationships between the ruler and his chosen churchmen-associates seemed to change.<sup>62</sup> The balance of power between the royal superiors and bishops was shattered: several Greek bishopric seats previously belonging

to the Archbishopric of Ohrid and the Patriarchate of Constantinople entered under the jurisdiction of the Serbian Church, whereas some important royal monasteries lost their autonomous status and became subject to Hilandar and other foundations.<sup>63</sup> Simultaneously, both the ruler and his high courtiers started to collaborate with various local church hierarchs, depending on whose territories they had made one or another ecclesiastic foundation. For example, Stefan Dušan worked on par with his royal superior Jakov (later promoted to the Metropolitan of Serres) to establish the royal monastery of the Holy Archangels and with the Archbishop Nicholas of Ohrid to build St. Nicholas Bolnički there. Following the example of the ruler, the king's courtier Jovan Oliver initially promoted the superiors of his own autonomous monastery of Lesnovo to the rank of Bishops in Zletovo and, later, also established a partnership with Archbishop Nicholas for a *parekklesion* at St. Sophia in Ohrid.<sup>64</sup>

As it seems, after the introduction of Milutin's policies of close alliance between ruler and churchman, the king gained the upper hand and the role of the churchman started to decrease. Often acting contrary to Church canons, Milutin still attempted to find some socially acceptable forms for his uncanonical interventions into ecclesiastic appointments, however, his successors merely considered such interference as normal royal behavior. Thus, from the adaptation of the Byzantine model of the parity relationship between rulers and church hierarchs in the 1210s, Serbian governing practice gradually shifted the balance in this alliance until rulers started simply to dictate the terms of collaboration to churchmen under the late Nemanjići.

## Notes

1. [Sergei Troicki, "Ktitorsko pravo u Vizantiji i Nemanjićkoj Srbiji" \[The Ktitor right in Byzantium and the Nemanjići Serbia\], \*Glas Srpske kraljevske akademije\* 168 \(1953\): 79–133; Ljubomir Maksimović, "L'idéologie du souverain dans l'État serbe et la construction de Studenica," in \*Studenica i vizantijska umetnost oko 1200\* \[Studenica and Byzantine art, ca. 1200\], ed. Vojislav Korać \(Belgrade: SANU, 1988\), 35–49; Smilja Marjanović-Dušanić, \*Vladarska ideologija\*](#)

- Nemanjića* [The ruling ideology of the Nemanjići] (Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruga, 1997); Vojislav Đurić, “La symphonie de l'État et l'Église dans la peinture murale en Serbie médiévale,” in *Sveti Sava u srpskoj istoriji i tradiciji: Međunarodni naučni skup* [St. Sava in Serbian history and tradition: International research conference], ed. Sima Ćirković (Belgrade: SANU, 1998), 203–23; Boško Bojović, *Vladarstvo i svetost u srpskom srednjem veku* [Rulership and holiness in the Serbian Middle Ages] (Belgrade: SANU, 1999); Danica Popović, *Pod okriljem svetosti: Kult svetih vladara i relikvija u srednjovekovnoj Srbiji* [Under the auspices of sanctity: The cult of holy rulers and relics in medieval Serbia] (Belgrade: Balkanološki institut, 2006); Smilja Marjanović-Dušanić, *Sveti kralj: Kult Stefana Dečanskog* [The holy king: The cult of St. Stefan of Dečani] (Belgrade: Clio, 2007); Ida Sinkević, “Serbian Royal Mausolea: A Quest for Cultural Identity,” in *Eclecticism in Late Medieval Visual Culture at the Crossroads of the Latin, Greek, and Slavic Traditions*, ed. Maria Alessia Rossi and Alice Isabella Sullivan (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), 58–76; Branislav Cvetković, “The Royal Imagery of Medieval Serbia,” in *Meanings and Functions of the Ruler's Image in the Mediterranean World (11th–15th Centuries)*, ed. Michele Bacci and Manuela Studer-Karlen (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 172–218.
2. On Byzantine imperial patronage, see Rosa Benoit-Meggenis, *L'empereur et le moine: Les relations du pouvoir impérial avec les monastères à Byzance (IXe–XIIIe)* (Lyon: Maison de l'Orient, 2017), 139–99.
  3. Several important works on bishopric hierarchies in Serbia regard the ecclesiastic hierarchy separately from the royal patronage activities: Jovanka Kalić, “Srpska država i Ohridska arhiepiskopija u XII veku” [The Serbian state and the archbishopric of Ohrid in the twelfth century], *Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta* 44 (2007): 197–208; Marija Janković, *Episkopije i mitropolije Srpske crkve u srednjem veku* [Episcopates and metropolises of the Serbian church in the Middle Ages] (Belgrade: Narodna knjiga, 1985); Ivana Komatina, *Crkva i država u srpskim zemljama: Od XI do XIII veka* [Church and state in Serbian lands: From the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries] (Belgrade: Istorijski Institut, 2016).

4. [Ruth Macrides, “The Competent Court,” in \*Law and Society in Byzantium: Ninth–Twelfth Centuries\*, eds. Angeliki E. Laiou and Dieter Simon \(Washington, DC.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library, 1994\), 117–29; Alexander Kazhdan, “Some Observations on the Byzantine Concept of Law: Three Authors of the Ninth through the Twelfth Centuries,” in Laiou and Simon, \*Law and Society in Byzantium\*, 199–216.](#)
5. [Elena Belyakova and Anatolij Turilov, “Кормчая книга” \[Kormchaya book\], \*Православная энциклопедия\* \[The Orthodox encyclopedia\] \(Moscow: Russian Orthodox Church, 2015\), 38:52–58, <https://www.pravenc.ru/text/2458663.html>.](#)
6. [On Rastko-Sava's biography and canonization, see the collected essays in \*Sava Nemanjić—Sveti Sava: Istorija i predanje\* \[Sava Nemanjić—St. Sava: History and tradition\], ed. Vojislav Đurić \(Belgrade: SANU, 1979\), and Ćirković, \*Sveti Sava u srpskoj istoriji i tradiciji\*. See also Leontije Pavlović, \*Kultovi lica kod Srba i Makedonaca\* \[Cults and personalities among the Serbs and Macedonians\] \(Smederevo: Narodni muzej, 1965\), 56–70; Miodrag Marković, \*Prvo putovanje svetog Save u Palestinu i njegov značaj za srpsku srednjovekovnu umetnost\* \[The first voyage of St. Sava to Palestine and its importance for medieval art in Serbia\] \(Belgrade: Vizantološki Institut, 2009\); Komatina, \*Crkva i država\*, 173–76, 186–91, 257–82.](#)
7. [On St. Sava's role in his father's canonization, see Popović, \*Pod okriljem\*, 27–74; Marjanović-Dušanić, \*Vladarska ideologija\*, 100–18.](#)
8. [On the Serbian Kingdom, see Miloš Blagojević, \*Srpska državnost u srednjem veku\* \[Serbian statehood in the Middle Ages\] \(Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruga, 2011\), 141–90. On the transfer of St. Simeon's relics, see Popović, \*Pod okriljem\*, 27–40. On Stefan Nemanjić' coronation, see Smilja Marjanović-Dušanić, \*Vladarske insignije i državna simbolika u Srbiji od XIII do XV veka\* \[Ruler insignia and state symbolism in Serbia from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries\] \(Belgrade: SANU, 1994\), 28–30.](#)
9. [On the relations between the Serbian Church and the Archbishopric of Ohrid, see Kalić, “Srpska država,” and Janković, \*Episkopije i mitropolije\*, 17–34.](#)



10. [Božidar Ferjančić and Ljubomir Maksimović, “Sveti Sava i Srbija između Epira i Nikeje” \[Saint Sava and Serbia between Epirus and Nicaea\], in Ćirković, \*Sveti Sava u srpskoj istoriji\*, 13–25.](#)
11. [On royal monasteries in Serbia, see Troicki, “Ktitorsko pravo,” and Marija Koprivica, “Kraljevski manastiri u srednjovekovnoj Srbiji” \[Royal monasteries in medieval Serbia\], in \*Srpska kraljevstva u srednjem veku\* \[Serbian kingdoms in the Middle Ages\], ed. Siniša Mišić \(Kraljevo: Univerzitet u Beogradu, 2017\), 147–62.](#)
12. [Kalić, “Srpska država,” 203–6; Günter Prinzing, “A Quasi Patriarch in the State of Epiros: The Autocephalous Archbishop of ‘Boulgaria’ \(Ohrid\) Demetrios Chomatenos,” \*Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta\* 41 \(2004\): 165–82.](#)
13. [Srđan Šarkić, “Recepcija grčko-rimskog \(vizantijskog\) prava u Srbiji” \[Reception of Greco-Roman \(Byzantine\) law in Serbia\], in \*Srednjovekovno pravo u Srba u ogledalu istorijskih izvora\* \[Medieval Serbian law in the mirror of historical sources\], eds. Sima Ćirković and Kosta Čavoški \(Belgrade: SANU, 2009\), 1–7.](#)
14. [Stanoje Stanojević, “Studije o srpskoj diplomaciji” \[Studies on the Serbian diplomatics\], vols. I–XXVIII, \*Glas Srpske Kraljevske akademije\* 90, 92, 94, 96, 100, 106, 110, 132, 156, 157, 159, 169 \(1912–14, 1920, 1922–23, 1928, 1933–34, 1936\); Marjanović-Dušanić, \*Vladarska ideologija\*, 10.](#)
15. [The Serbian liturgical texts followed the Evergetis Synaxarion but were locally adapted. See Tatjana Subotin-Golubović, “Prilog poznavanju bogoslužjenja u srpskoj crkvi krajem XIII veka” \[A contribution to studies of the Serbian church services at the end of the thirteenth century\], \*Hilandarski zbornik\* 10 \(1998\): 153–77; Viktor Savić, “Srpski prevod ‘Evergetidskog sinaksara’ u dva sinajska rukopisa” \[Serbian translation of the Evergetis Synaxarion in two Sinai manuscripts\], \*Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta\* 53 \(2016\): 209–35.](#)
16. [On St. Sava's name in the \*Nomokanon\*'s colophon, see Ljubomir Stojanović, ed., \*Stari srpski zapisi i natpisi\* \[Old Serbian inscriptions and notes\] \(Belgrade: SANU, 1902\), 1:7–8, no. 19. On the attribution of the translation to a group headed by St. Sava at Philokalion Monastery \(Thessaloniki\), see Dimitrije Bogdanović, “Krmčija](#)

- svetoga Save” [The *Krmčija* of St. Sava], in Đurić, *Sava Nemanjić—Sveti Sava*, 91–99; Miodrag Petrović, “Istorijsko-pravni značaj *Zakonopravila* Svetoga Save” [Historical and legal significance of the *Zakonopravilo* by St. Sava], *Glasnik prava* 2 (1993): 15–23; Ljiljana Juhas-Georgievska, ed., *Domentijan: Žitije Svetoga Save* [*Domentijan: Life of St. Sava*] (Belgrade: Prosveta, 2001), 212.
17. On the sources of the *Nomokanon*, see Sergei Troicki, “Ko je preveo *Krmčiju* sa tumačenjima” [Who did translate *Krmčija* with interpretations], *Glas Srpske akademije nauka* 193 (1949): 119–42.
  18. For the same council decisions in Byzantine practice, see Bernard Stolte, “Law for Founders,” in *Founders and Refounders of Byzantine Monasteries*, ed. Margaret Mullett (Belfast: Belfast Byzantine Enterprises, 2007), 123–39.
  19. Miodrag Petrović, ed., *Zakonopravilo ili Nomokanon svetoga Save: Ilovički prepis 1262 godine; Fototipija* [*Zakonopravilo or Nomocanon by Saint Sava: Ilovički manuscript of 1262; Phototype edition*] (Gornji Milanovac: Dečje novine, 1991), fols. 166v–167r.
  20. Petrović, *Zakonopravilo*, fol. 167v.
  21. On the crusade's weakening of the Byzantine bishopric system, see Michael Angold, *The Fourth Crusade: Event and Context* (Oxon: Routledge, 2015), 163–92; David Jacoby, “The Greeks of Constantinople under Latin Rule, 1204–1261,” in *The Fourth Crusade: Event, Aftermath, and Perceptions*, ed. Thomas Madden (London: Ashgate, 2008), 53–73. On the Evergetis reform movement, see John Philip Thomas, *Private Religious Foundations in the Byzantine Empire* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library, 1987), 214–43; John Philip Thomas, “Documentary Evidence from the Byzantine Monastic Typika for the History of the Evergetine Reform Movement,” in *The Theotokos Evergetis and Eleventh-Century Monasticism*, eds. Margaret Mullett and Anthony Kirby (Belfast: Belfast Byzantine Enterprises, 1994), 246–73.
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  28. Tomislav Jovanović, ed. Sveti sava: Sabrani spisi [St. Sava: Collected writings] (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1986), 64.
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31. [Jovanović, \*Sveti sava\*, 138–42.](#)
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54. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, 150–51.](#)
55. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, 151.](#)
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# 10

## THE DANUBIAN LANDS, MOUNT ATHOS, AND MOUNT SINAI

### Meaningful Connections

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Few religious centers from within the Byzantine cultural sphere are as important for Eastern Christianity and have as long and robust a history as the monastic communities on Mount Athos and the monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai.<sup>1</sup> The latter is older, dating to the time of Emperor Justinian in the sixth century; the former has sustained a communal monastic life among multiple monasteries since the tenth century. Both remote and difficult to access, the monastic communities on Mount Athos and at Sinai established a strong footing on the spiritual and ideological landscape of Byzantium, extending their impact far beyond the empire's borders during the Middle Ages and in the so-called post-Byzantine period. These monasteries fostered far-reaching connections, receiving donations and gifts from numerous Christian leaders and their subjects, including the



rulers of the principalities to the north of Danube River. Among their many patrons, we find the leaders of Wallachia and Moldavia, who, in addition to supporting local religious sites within their respective domains, extended support to the Athonite and Sinai monasteries—some of the holiest and oldest Christian sites, active to this day. Their support had manifold implications in practical and symbolic terms.

Drawing on textual sources and material evidence, this chapter explores the connections between Mount Athos, Mount Sinai, and the north-Danubian lands during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the manifold implications of patronage, and the impact of these holy sites in the local formulations of piety and ruling ideology. The sources of analysis include monumental building projects and objects in various media, as well as documents and inscriptions. This evidence, although fragmentary, helps reveal patterns of patronage, as well as the meanings and functions of the donations and gifts in the decades leading up to and after the fall of Constantinople in 1453. The two following sections analyze aspects of the connections with Mount Athos and Mount Sinai, respectively, first within the Moldavian context and then in the Wallachian one. These cross-cultural links reveal how the legacy of the Byzantine emperors—who first took on the role of *ktetors* (protectors) of these distant holy sites—was continued and transformed in the north-Danubian principalities.<sup>2</sup> The final section discusses the various implications of this patronage and avenues for further research so that students and researchers may continue to explore the intriguing and meaningful cultural connections that extended across Eastern Europe and the Byzantine cultural spheres in the late Middle Ages, as well as the roles of key rulers and monastic sites within these networks.

### **Patronage of Mount Athos**

The monastic community of Mount Athos—consisting of twenty monasteries and a small parliament in the capital city of Karyes—continually drew support from an array of Eastern Christian patrons, including the Byzantine emperors and the rulers of neighboring regions in the Balkan Peninsula, the Carpathian Mountains, and along the Black Sea coast.<sup>3</sup> The sources confirm that the Georgian princes and the rulers of

Trebizond, for example, regularly extended gifts to the Athonite monasteries of Iviron and Dionysiou, respectively, while the Serbian leaders favored the monasteries of Saint Paul, Simonopetra, and especially Hilandar, among others.<sup>4</sup> Although the later centuries of the Byzantine Empire proved more tumultuous, the ongoing patronage of Mount Athos continued. By the middle of the fourteenth century, the rulers of the principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia also began to play a significant role in the support of the Athonite communities. They routinely provided financial assistance, initiated restoration projects, and gifted precious religious objects to all the monasteries.<sup>5</sup> In fact, whereas other regions of the Eastern Christian sphere, adjacent to Byzantium, had one or several monasteries that they favored, the rulers of the north-Danubian principalities supported every one of the twenty monasteries on Mount Athos, including the church in Karyes. This patronage at large continued the legacy of the Byzantine Empire but transformed it in a local context, informed by the desires and ambitions of each of the patrons who took on this noteworthy role.

The extant sources tell us that the patronage of Mount Athos among the rulers of Moldavia and Wallachia began sometime during the reign of Wallachia's prince Nicholas Alexander (r. ca. 1344–52 with Basarab I; 1352–64 alone), who made an initial donation to Koutloumousiou Monastery.<sup>6</sup> From Moldavia, the earliest Athonite donation dates to the reign of Alexander I “the Good” (r. 1400–32), who initiated an annual payment (the amount of which remains unknown) to Zographou Monastery. This payment likely occurred before 1416. A document kept in the archive of Zographou, dated 22 August 1416, details the arrival of Hieromonk Kyr Dometianus and Jupan Mudrăcica to Zographou. They arrived at the request of Alexander I and his son Iliăș (Elias), referred to in the document as “our ktetor and benefactor.”<sup>7</sup> This patronage continued, possibly on an annual basis, until at least 26 May 1442. A document bearing this date reveals that one of Alexander's sons, Stephen II (r. 1434–47), granted the monks of Zographou the privilege of coming each year to Moldavia to receive the yearly donation promised by his father.<sup>8</sup> The patronage of Mount Athos that was initiated by the leaders of the north-Danubian principalities in the mid-fourteenth century thus set the example for their heirs, who respected those

initial promises and similarly took on, and at times even amplified, the support. In this way, each ruler and their families left their own mark on this ktetorship of Mount Athos.

After the fall of Constantinople in 1453, circumstances changed, and the Christian communities across Eastern Europe faced magnified difficulties. In the decades that followed the demise of Byzantium, as the Bulgarian, Serbian, Muscovite, Georgian, and even Wallachian rulers reduced or ended altogether their support of the Athonite communities, the Moldavian rulers, and, in particular, Stephen III “the Great” (r. 1457–1504), took an increasingly active interest in Mount Athos.<sup>9</sup> At that time, the Moldavian support of Mount Athos increased and shifted in curious ways and may have been facilitated by the political and economic stability in the principality that resulted from Stephen's lengthy reign—spanning almost half a century. Stephen made substantial monetary donations to the Athonite monasteries, as well as gifts of manuscripts, icons, textiles, and liturgical vessels. Through this patronage, Stephen continued the legacy of the Byzantine emperors after 1453, strengthened the connections between Moldavia and Mount Athos, and further transformed his spiritual and ideological identity as a ruler of a region that was never part of the Byzantine Empire but experienced the impact of Byzantium.

The extant sources reveal that the Moldavian-Athonite connections in the second half of the fifteenth century began with Stephen's patronage of Zographou Monastery, thus following in the footsteps of his Moldavian predecessors. A chrysobull from 10 May 1466 indicates that a large annual payment of 100 Hungarian ducats (about three thousand pieces of gold) should reach Zographou from Moldavia.<sup>10</sup> On 13 September 1471, Stephen offered an additional five hundred aspra (ἄσπρον, pl. ἄσπρα about ten pieces of gold) to Zographou, specifically for the infirmary there.<sup>11</sup> Several icons, manuscripts, embroideries, and metalwork also reached Zographou from the Moldavian court during Stephen's reign.<sup>12</sup> For example, two gilded silver *rhypidia* (liturgical fans) were bestowed upon the monastery on 30 July 1488. They are now part of the collection of the church of Saint John the Theologian in Patmos, Greece. The pair presented to Zographou closely resemble the liturgical fans in the collection at Putna Monastery in Moldavia, which were gifts of Stephen on 14 January 1497, as revealed by

the dedicatory inscriptions around the *nodi* (knops) of their handles ([Figure 10.1](#)).<sup>13</sup> Both sets display circular repoussé plaques with seraphim that are connected by delicate filigree within circular and diamond motifs. The larger central medallion shows the symbols of the Evangelists around the seraphim. It is very likely that both sets were produced in Transylvania, possibly in the city of Sibiu (Hermannstadt), which specialized in such exquisite metalwork. That Stephen commissioned two sets of these liturgical fans and gifted one to Zographou and the other to his princely mausoleum at Putna Monastery is revealing. It indicates, on the one hand, his desire to endow both monasteries—at home and abroad—with extremely lavish liturgical objects. On the other hand, this patronage suggests that perhaps many of the gifted objects to Mount Athos may have had an equivalent offered to a Moldavian religious site. This would have contributed to the bond between the distant monasteries, which would have been reimagined and revitalized during the celebration of the liturgy. The lack of a complete material record from the late Middle Ages makes this intriguing hypothesis difficult to confirm, however.





[Figure 10.1](#) [Liturgical fan, gilded silver, 1497.](#)

*Source:* Putna Monastery.

Notable among the objects Stephen gifted to Zographou is the standard embroidered with gold, silver, and silk thread featuring Saint George, completed in 1500 ([Figure 10.2](#)).<sup>14</sup> Saint George appears enthroned at the center, holding a sword and crushing a three-headed dragon beneath his feet, while two angels place a gem-encrusted crown upon his head. The dedicatory inscription written in Church Slavonic encircles the margin of the image on the embroidery and calls to Saint George, the “great martyr and bearer of victory,” to receive the patron's prayer and intercede on his behalf in this life and the next.<sup>15</sup> The same request is further extended to the monastic community at Zographou that received the gift and would have, upon reading the inscription, remembered Stephen and his deeds. As such, the donations would have incited regular remembrance of the patron and

donor among the local receiving community. Moreover, the dedication of the *katholikon* (main monastic church) at Zographou to Saint George may have incited Stephen to prefer this particular Athonite monastery. Saint George was also one of Moldavia's most popular patron saints.<sup>16</sup> It thus appears that the saint and the monastery dedicated to him on Mount Athos were particularly important to Stephen of Moldavia.



[Figure 10.2 Embroidered liturgical standard with St. George, gold and silver thread on silk, 123.8 × 94 × 94.2 cm, ca. 1500.](#)

Source: National History Museum, Bucharest, Nr.inv.75062.

Stephen's patronage of Mount Athos included all the monasteries and extended for the entirety of his reign. Even as he was nearing the end of his life, he continually supported the Athonite communities. Between 1500 and 1501, for example, Stephen directed resources for the building of an aqueduct, a baptistery, and a mill at Saint Paul.<sup>17</sup> Gregoriou Monastery, destroyed by the Ottomans in the last decade of the fifteenth century, was also rebuilt at this time. In taking interest in Gregoriou, Stephen continued projects initiated by his late son, Alexander (d. 1496). A partial inscription in Church Slavonic survives on the bell tower, to the north of the church, which reads, "The devout prince John Stephen voivode built this in the year 1502."<sup>18</sup> Beginning in 1500, Gregoriou received from Stephen a very substantial annual donation of four thousand aspra (about eighty gold pieces).<sup>19</sup> Stephen's pious acts toward Gregoriou were a family affair. Not only was his son Alexander a patron, but his second wife, Maria Asanina Palaiologina of Mangup, whom he married on 14 September 1472, was also a keen supporter. Sometime before her death on 19 December 1477, she gifted to Gregoriou a miracle-working icon of the Virgin Pantanassa and precious embroideries, including the two *podeai* (textile icon hanging) still in the collection of the monastery showing the Hospitality of Abraham and the Presentation of the Virgin ([Figure 10.3](#)).<sup>20</sup> Such examples demonstrate the high level of skill in Moldavian embroidery workshops of the second half of the fifteenth century, facilitated, in part, by Maria's presence at the Moldavian court.<sup>21</sup>





[Figure 10.3](#) [Podea with the Presentation of the Virgin, 46 × 38 × 38 cm, before 1477.](#)

Source: Gregoriou Monastery.

Whereas Moldavia enjoyed several decades of relative stability that enabled the patronage of remote sites beyond the borders of the realm during the second half of the fifteenth century, the situation in Wallachia was more tumultuous. Wallachia experienced multiple turbulent economic, political, and military situations that did not offer a favorable environment for artistic patronage in a local context or in centers beyond the principality's borders.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, by the initial decades of the sixteenth century, the circumstances had improved, and a more stable and prosperous period began. It was under the leadership of the Wallachian prince Neagoe Basarab (r. 1512–21) that some of the most remarkable developments took place in the artistic sphere in Wallachia, which extended in the form of support to other religious centers in the Balkans and across the Mediterranean.<sup>23</sup>

Like Stephen of Moldavia, Neagoe of Wallachia made significant donations to local churches and monasteries, as well as to religious communities located beyond the borders of his realm, including Greece, Mount Athos, Jerusalem, and even Mount Sinai. In addition to monetary gifts, Neagoe extended precious icons, manuscripts, embroideries, and metalwork, which helped support the religious communities while renewing the objects needed for the celebration of the liturgy. Beginning in 1517, for example, he initiated monetary support to Sosinou Holy Monastery near the village of Ano Parakalamos, Greece.<sup>24</sup> The monastery of Treskavec in the Republic of North Macedonia similarly benefited from Neagoe's generous funding.<sup>25</sup> The *pomenik* of the monastery, now preserved in the National Library of Serbia, mentions Neagoe's donations.<sup>26</sup> In the Serbian cultural context, Neagoe and his family extended support to Dečani Monastery, among other places, including a phelonion, now in the collection of the National Museum of Belgrade.<sup>27</sup> The support from the Wallachian court was monetary and took the form of precious textiles, metalwork, and manuscripts, among others, which were needed at each religious site.

Although no single Athonite monastery received Moldavian or Wallachian support for much of the fifteenth century, by the turn of the sixteenth century, Moldavia's patronage of Zographou Monastery became extensive and, in a way, also equivalent to Wallachia's concentrated interests in Koutloumousiou Monastery. Koutloumousiou was important to

the Wallachians as it was one of the first Athonite monasteries to be helped by the rulers of this north-Danubian principality. Nicholas Alexander contributed to substantial rebuilding projects at Koutloumousiou in the mid-fourteenth century, which increased the size and prestige of the monastery. But by 1517, Neagoe returned to an older model and began to support, in one way or another, virtually all of the monasteries on the Holy Mount.<sup>28</sup> At the monasteries of Saint Paul, Iviron, Pantokrator, Philotheou, Simonopetra, Hilandar, Koutloumousiou, and Xeropotamou, Neagoe contributed toward the restoration and rebuilding of the churches, refectories, cellars, arsenas, and defensive structures, in addition to other general maintenance.<sup>29</sup> Xenophontos Monastery similarly benefited from Neagoe's generosity. Its treasury preserves an epitachelion executed in a Wallachian workshop in the early sixteenth century in gold, silver, and colored silk thread, showing Neagoe and his family as patrons.<sup>30</sup> Around 1520, at Vatopedi Monastery, Neagoe restored the monastic buildings, the tower, as well as the church of the Annunciation and the chapel of the Holy Zone, or belt (ζώνη).<sup>31</sup> An inventory from 27 May 1596 also mentions vessels for the great myrrh that Neagoe donated to Vatopedi several decades earlier.<sup>32</sup>

The Great Lavra on Mount Athos, furthermore, is said to have been rebuilt entirely during Neagoe's time, with his assistance, including the church of Saint Athanasius the Athonite.<sup>33</sup> Several textiles in the collection of the monastery are also a testament to the lavish gifts from Wallachia to this important Athonite locale in the early sixteenth century: a *podea* from a Wallachian workshop commissioned by Neagoe and another gifted by his wife, Militsa Despina, and her mother, Donca.<sup>34</sup> These types of donations highlight the focused and prolonged effort to ensure the proper continuation of monastic life on Mount Athos among all the monasteries. This is an aspect of patronage evident in the deeds of most rulers from the north-Danubian principalities, especially in the post-Byzantine period.

Out of all the Athonite communities, Neagoe has been most closely intertwined with Dionysiou Monastery. The Wallachian ruler sponsored the restoration of the complex, including the church dedicated to Saint John the Baptist, the defense tower, and the aqueduct.<sup>35</sup> Around 1515, he gifted the monastery a lavish crystal reliquary with the remains of Saint John the Baptist, Saint John Chrysostom, and the Apostle Peter, now part of the

collection of the Topkapı Palace Museum in Istanbul.<sup>36</sup> But the most intense expression of Neagoe's piety and the cultural connections that he established between Wallachia and Mount Athos are conveyed in the monastery's gilded silver reliquary with most of the remains of Saint Niphon (ca. 1435–40 to 1508), which Neagoe commissioned around 1515 in a local workshop ([Figure 10.4](#)).<sup>37</sup> Measuring  $42 \times 30 \times 42$  centimeters, the five-dome design of the reliquary draws visual and symbolic connections between similar church types from across the Christian spheres, including the famed Holy Apostles Church in Constantinople, which served as the burial site for all Byzantine emperors from the time of Emperor Justinian (r. 527–65) through the eleventh century, and Neagoe's church at Curtea de Argeș, which was consecrated in 1517 and designed from the outset to serve as a princely mausoleum for the Wallachian ruling elite.<sup>38</sup>



[Figure 10.4 Reliquary of St. Niphon, ca. 1515, Dionysiou Monastery, Mount Athos.](#)

*Source:* Dionysiou Monastery.

The visual vocabulary of the reliquary further connects the Wallachian ruler to Saint Niphon, a monk on Mount Athos who served twice as the ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople (1486–87, 1497–98) and even held the office of metropolitan of Wallachia (1504–5).<sup>39</sup> The inside lid—only visible when the reliquary is open to provide access to the remnants within

—shows Neagoe in the presence of Saint Niphon, in an ambiguous setting, approaching the holy man in a gesture of supplication ([Figure 10.5](#)).<sup>40</sup> Neagoe, dressed in royal gold-trimmed garments with his long, curly hair falling on his shoulders beneath a large gold crown encrusted with precious stones, is shown in three-quarter view, raising both hands toward the central saintly figure. He does not come into direct contact with the saint, but his gesture implies a perpetual appeal to the holy man. Saint Niphon, in turn, is frontal and positioned at the center of the composition, slightly larger in scale than Neagoe to emphasize his holy status. He holds a richly bound manuscript in his left hand, presumably a text of the four Gospels, and raises his right hand in a blessing gesture toward the Wallachian ruler, as if confirming receipt of his petitions. Neagoe's privileged position within this intimate composition highlights the deep spiritual connection between the two figures, thus linking the Byzantine and Athonite cultural and spiritual spheres with the Wallachian realm.



[Figure 10.5 Painting of the inside lid showing Neagoe Basarab and St. Niphon, Reliquary of Saint Niphon, ca. 1515, Dionysiou Monastery, Mount Athos.](#)

*Source:* Dionysiou Monastery.

Neagoe's patronage of Mount Athos and his preference for monasteries with Serbian connections follow familial and diplomatic lines. Wallachia's contacts with neighboring Serbia were strengthened in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries through key marriages and cultural contacts. Around 1505, Neagoe himself married Militsa Despina of Serbia—a descendant of the houses of Branković and Lazarević.<sup>41</sup> But even before this time, women were important players in such exchanges. The Greco-Serbian princess Mara Branković (ca. 1418–87)—the third child of the Serbian despot George Branković (r. 1427–56)—was a keen patron and diplomat connected with Mount Athos.<sup>42</sup> Upon her death, she bequeathed all of her assets to Hilandar and Saint Paul, and she passed the ktetorship of her Athonite monasteries to the Wallachian rulers. Neagoe's patronage of these monasteries contributed to the already established tradition of such support from within Serbia and later Wallachia. Therefore, as the Branković dynasty was declining by the mid-fifteenth century, the Wallachians took on the role of new patrons of these Athonite institutions, continuing and expanding past efforts.

The reasons for patronage of Mount Athos are manifold. The rulers of the north-Danubian principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia had political, spiritual, and ideological reasons to extend gifts and monetary donations to these remote Athonite monasteries, at times preferring some over others. The concentrated donations at any given moment to a particular monastery—like Zographou for Stephen III and Dionysiou for Neagoe, for example—did not detract from gifts extended to other Athonite monasteries. In fact, these preferred sites are related either to local and familial traditions or attachments to particular holy figures, like Saint George and Saint Niphon, for example. Such patronage also ensured the commemoration and spiritual protection of the donor and his family among the monastic community receiving the gift. Finally, the chief impetus for the steady Moldavian and

Wallachian contributions to Mount Athos may have come from each ruler's aspirations as a Christian leader and protector of the Christian faith at a time when Constantinople and the Byzantine Empire were no more, after 1453.

### **Patronage of Mount Sinai**


Like the monastic communities on Mount Athos, the monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai—one of the oldest still-active Christian monastic communities in the world—also benefited from the assistance of Byzantine and other Christian rulers. Dating to the sixth century, the monastery received Byzantine imperial support, beginning with Emperor Justinian (r. 527–65), and developed into an important locus of Eastern Christian spirituality, pilgrimage, and monastic life.<sup>43</sup> Emulating the Byzantine model, the Moldavian and Wallachian rulers became active patrons of Saint Catherine Monastery as well.

The evidence from Moldavia is scarce, but the Sinai library holds several manuscripts from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, including a book of Psalms (*Oktoikh*) produced in the scriptorium at Putna Monastery in Moldavia in the fifteenth century and another from 1566, also from a Moldavian workshop.<sup>44</sup> A key example of metalwork is the *panaghiarion* of ca. 1500 from Moldavia, as well as several religious objects in metalwork produced in Transylvanian workshops and gifted to Sinai by the Moldavian elite in the sixteenth century.<sup>45</sup> It is likely that these donations were accompanied by monetary gifts that helped ensure the support and continuation of the cenobitic communities at Mount Sinai. This line of research remains to be developed in light of archival work at Sinai and other relevant collections.

From Wallachia, we know that on 15 September 1497, Radu the Great (r. 1495–1508) initiated an annual payment of 5000 aspra (about one hundred gold pieces) to Sinai and 500 aspra to the monk(s) who would come to Wallachia to retrieve the funds.<sup>46</sup> As indicated in the document, this donation was to be continued by his followers. With this act, Radu the Great set the foundation for Wallachian support of Mount Sinai, which Neagoe continued, although no such document survives from his reign. But an important visual record does, which underscores the connection that



extended between Wallachia and Sinai in the early sixteenth century. Discovered in digital form in the so-called Sinai Archive at the University of Michigan, the object in question sheds light on Neagoe's interactions with Saint Catherine Monastery at Mount Sinai during his brief reign ([Figure 10.6](#)).<sup>47</sup> The object is the lid of a wooden box, carrying on the inside an image of Neagoe and his immediate family kneeling in supplication before an image of the Virgin Mary with the Christ Child (of the Blachernitissa type) in a heavenly sphere at the central upper portion of the composition. The Wallachian royal family is divided into two symmetrical groups: the men on the left and the women on the right. On the left is Neagoe and his three sons: Theodosius, Peter, and John. On the right is his wife, Militsa Despina, and their daughters: Stana, Roxanda, and Anghelina.<sup>48</sup> The distinctive features and garments of the figures, as well as the inscriptions in Church Slavonic above their heads, help identify the members of this ruling family.<sup>49</sup> Although the setting of the Sinai panel is ambiguous—perhaps deliberately so in order to draw attention to the figures in the foreground—dark crosses or trees are scattered around the scene. These visual elements help indicate perspective in the composition while framing the royal clan in the foreground. Richly garbed and kneeling in supplication, Neagoe and his family display a carefully crafted image of piety and devotion that reached the distant shores of the Mediterranean, regularly reminding the monks at Sinai of this Wallachian ruler, his family, and their pious generosity.

 A lid of a wooden box shows Neagoe and his immediate family kneeling in supplication before an image of the Virgin Mary with the Christ Child.

[Figure 10.6](#) [Lid of a wooden box showing Prince Neagoe Basarab and his immediate family, Wallachia, modern Romania, now in the collection of Saint Catherine Monastery at Mount Sinai.](#)

*Source:* Saint Catherine Monastery at Mount Sinai.

The indentations of where hardware once attached the lid to the box with two nails on each side remain visible, so clearly the image in the central composition once decorated the inside of the lid. Upon its arrival at Sinai, those who opened the wooden box would have first encountered the image of the Wallachian prince alongside his immediate family, kneeling in prayer and directing their attention toward the Virgin and Child. On an individual level, the image displays the faith of the patrons, as well as their desire for divine intercession and hope for eventual salvation. On a communal level, moreover, the image was intended to incite prayer and remembrance in perpetuity for the Wallachian royal family among the monastic community at Sinai receiving the gifts. This object requires further study, including an analysis of the wood and pigments used in the decoration. These details could provide insight into the origins of its creation, likely in the Wallachian cultural context. But even in more practical terms, its exact dimensions may help shed light on the functions of the box to which the lid once belonged.

Although the evidence is scarce, we know that Neagoe extended donations to the monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai, thus adhering to a long tradition of such patronage among Wallachian rulers. The box to which this lid once belonged could have been a reliquary, akin to that of Saint Niphon at Dionysiou Monastery on Mount Athos, which Neagoe commissioned around 1515. Neagoe's portrait on the inside lid recalls his image on the Sinai panel, indicating that they originated in the same cultural context, likely at the Wallachian royal court. The box could have also carried precious icons, manuscripts, or embroideries from Wallachia to Sinai. Some may still be preserved today in the collection of the monastery and, in digital form, in the Sinai Digital Archive that is the result of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria expeditions to the Holy Mount in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>50</sup> Like this panel with Neagoe and his family, other treasures remain to be discovered, which could validate or complicate the network of contacts that extended between Mount Sinai and the Danubian lands.

## **Implications of Patronage**

The connections between Mount Athos, Mount Sinai, and the regions around the Danube River extended for much of the late Middle Ages, beginning for the principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia in the middle of the fourteenth century. The patronage of the remote monastic communities aligned with a long tradition of such efforts by Byzantine emperors and other Christian leaders, which intensified and shifted in curious ways after the fall of Constantinople in 1453. Once the Byzantine Empire collapsed, the rulers of neighboring regions in the Balkans, the Carpathians, and further north took on the active role as supporters of these monasteries, ensuring their continuation in a time of turmoil. This patronage of Mount Athos and Mount Sinai had several broader implications for the Moldavian and Wallachian rulers and their families. First, these expressions of piety ensured the perpetual remembrance of the patrons during local commemorative services. Their names would have been regularly read and acknowledged, and prayers would have been directed for their protection and eventual salvation with each service. Second, the patronage ensured the continuation of the monasteries at a time when the Eastern Christian cultural spheres suffered the most, after the events of 1453. The money and gifts that arrived from the north-Danubian territories contributed to renovations and new building projects, as well as helped supply the objects needed for liturgical rituals. Third, this patronage was deeply tied to ruling ideologies among the rulers of Moldavia and Wallachia. Through such efforts, the rulers emulated the ktetorship of the Byzantine emperors who had come before them. As such, the principalities, and their rulers by extension, were cast as heirs to Byzantine Orthodoxy. Fourth, these connections that were established between Mount Athos, Mount Sinai, and the Danubian principalities actively promoted the legacy of Byzantium in these regions through the transfer of artistic and cultural knowledge. This was facilitated through the movements of people and objects, which informed local artistic practices. The legacy of Byzantium was thus evident in the design and decoration of local churches; in the execution of icons, woodwork, and textiles; and in the celebrations of religious rituals. Indeed, the local visual culture and religious customs in Moldavia and Wallachia closely emulated those of Byzantium as expressed on Mount Athos and Mount Sinai. Finally, such exchanges and contact contributed to the formation of new sacred landscapes in the Carpathian Mountain regions,

which emulated those of Mount Athos, for example, through a large number of newly built chapels, churches, and monasteries.

The contacts and exchanges between Mount Athos, Mount Sinai, and the Danubian principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia deserve further study. Future lines of research may consider the broader economic and symbolic implications of these exchanges for each region, additional agents in the transfer of artistic and cultural knowledge, as well as local adaptations in visual culture and rituals relative to competing traditions in the so-called post-Byzantine period. Local archives and collections in all of these cultural centers likely hold additional treasures and sources that remain to be discovered and fully studied—like the panel from Sinai with Neagoe and his family—which in time will help enhance the picture of these contacts that transformed and diversified the cultural landscapes of Eastern Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean in the late medieval and post-Byzantine periods.

## Notes

1. [For Mount Athos, see Graham Speake, \*Mount Athos: Renewal in Paradise\* \(New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002\); Graham Speake, \*A History of the Athonite Commonwealth: The Spiritual and Cultural Diaspora of Mount Athos\* \(Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018\); Graham Speake and Metropolitan Kallistos, eds., \*Mount Athos: Microcosm of the Christian East\* \(Oxford: Peter Lang, 2012\); Elizabeth Zachariadou, “Mount Athos and the Ottomans c. 1350–1550,” in \*The Cambridge History of Christianity: Eastern Christianity\*, ed. Michael Angold \(Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006\), 154–68.](#)
2. [A \*ktetor\* \(κτῆτωρ; ктитор; ctitor\) was the title given in the Middle Ages to a founder: someone who provided funds for the construction or reconstruction of an Orthodox church or monastery.](#)
3. [The twenty Athonite monasteries, listed chronologically from the earliest founded to the most recent, are the Great Lavra \(963\), Xeropotamou \(971\), Zographou \(972\), Iviron \(980\), Vatopedi \(985\), Xenophontos \(1010\), Stavronikita \(1012\), Philotheou \(1015\),](#)

- [Esphigmenou \(1016\)](#), [Karakalou \(1018\)](#), [Dochiarou \(1046\)](#), [Konstamonitou \(1051\)](#), [Koutloumousiou \(1169\)](#), [Hilandar \(1198\)](#), [Saint Paul \(1259\)](#), [Gregoriou \(1345\)](#), [Pantokratoros \(1363\)](#), [Simonopetra \(1363\)](#), [Dionysiou \(1370\)](#), [Saint Panteleimon \(1394\)](#).
4. [See Tamara Grdzelidze, “The Georgians on Mount Athos,” in Speake and Ware, \*Mount Athos\*, 29–44; Vladeta Janković, “The Serbian Tradition on Mount Athos,” in Speake and Ware, \*Mount Athos\*, 79–95.](#)
  5. [See, most notably, Petre Ș. Năsturel, \*Le Mont Athos et les Roumains: Recherches sur leurs relations du milieu du XIVe siècle à 1654\* \(Rome: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1986\); Radu G. Păun, “Mount Athos and the Byzantine-Slavic Tradition in Wallachia and Moldavia after the Fall of Constantinople,” in \*The Balkans and the Byzantine World Before and After the Captures of Constantinople, 1204 and 1453\*, ed. Vlada Stanković \(Lanham: Lexington, 2016\), 117–63.](#)
  6. [Petre Ș. Năsturel, “Le Mont Athos et ses premiers contacts avec la principauté de Valachie,” \*Bulletin de l’Association internationale d’études du sud-est européen\* 1, nos. 1–2 \(1963\): 32–36; Năsturel, \*Le Mont Athos et les Roumains\*, 39–71.](#)
  7. [The document was discovered by the Bulgarian church historian Mikhail Kovachev and published most recently by Georgi R. Parpulov in “Rumanci i slavjani na Sveta Gora prez 1416 g. \(Iz istorijata na Sèlinskija skit\)” \[Romanians and Slavs on Mount Athos in AD 1416 \(notes on the history of the Selina hermitage\)\], \*Palaeobulgarica\* 35, no. 2 \(2011\): 59–64. See also Năsturel, \*Le Mont Athos et les Roumains\*, 180 and 180n10; Virgil Cîndea, \*Mărturii românești peste hotare\* \[Romanian testimonies abroad\] \(Bucharest: Editura Biblioteca Bucureștilor, 2011–14\), II:631.](#)
  8. [\*Documenta Romaniae historica\*, seria B, \*Țara Românească\*, vol. 1, 1247–1500, ed. Petre P. Panaitescu and Damaschin Mioc \(Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1966\), 311–12; Cîndea, \*Mărturii românești peste hotare\*, II:632.](#)
  9. [See, especially, Alice Isabella Sullivan, “The Athonite Patronage of Stephen III of Moldavia, 1457–1504,” \*Speculum\* 94, no. 1 \(2019\): 1–46; Alice Isabella Sullivan, \*The Eclectic Visual Culture of Medieval Moldavia\* \(Leiden: Brill, 2023\), 126–76; Alice Isabella Sullivan,](#)

- Europe's Eastern Christian Frontier* (York: Arc Humanities Press, 2024).
10. For a transcription and English translation of this document, see Sullivan, “The Athonite Patronage of Stephen III,” 44–46.
  11. *Documenta Romaniae historica*, seria B, *Țara Românească*, vol. 2, 1501–1525, 261; Sullivan, “The Athonite Patronage of Stephen III,” 13.
  12. See Sullivan, “The Athonite Patronage of Stephen III,” 13–29.
  13. Mihai Berza, ed., *Repertoriul monumentelor și operelor de artă din timpul lui Ștefan cel Mare* [The repertoire of monuments and works of art from the time of Stephen the Great] (Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1958), 345–46; *Holy Putna Monastery, 1466–2016: 550 Years Since the Laying of the Foundational Stone* (Putna: Editura “Mitropolit Iacov Putneanul,” 2016), 393, figs. 135–36; Evans, ed., *Byzantium: Faith and Power*, 132–33.
  14. National Museum of History, Bucharest, inv. no. 75062; Ernest Oberländer-Târnoveanu, “Stindardul liturgic al lui Ștefan cel Mare” [The liturgical banner of Stephen the Great], in *Capodopere din patrimoniul Muzeului Național de Istorie a României*, ed. Cornel Ilie (Bucharest: Muzeum Național de Istorie, 2012), 48–55, at 50; Sullivan, “The Athonite Patronage of Stephen III,” 16–17.
  15. For a transcription and English translation of the inscription, see Sullivan, *The Eclectic Visual Culture of Medieval Moldavia*, 143.
  16. Saint George was deemed to have played a major role in the battle of Baia that took place in Moldavia in mid-December 1467, in the aftermath of which Stephen emerged victorious against Matthias Corvinus and his Hungarian armies. To commemorate his victory, Stephen erected shortly after the battle a church dedicated to Saint George in that same village. About two decades later, in 1488, when Stephen initiated his intensive ecclesiastical building campaigns throughout Moldavia, among the first churches he built was the katholikon dedicated to Saint George at Voroneț Monastery.
  17. Jeanne Fourier-Pargoire, Gabriel Millet, and Louis David Petit, eds., *Recueil des inscriptions chrétiennes de l'Athos* (Paris: Fontemoing, 1904), 153–54 (nos. 448, 449).
  18. Năsturel, *Le Mont Athos et les Roumains*, 270n2.

19. [Documenta Romaniae historica, seria B, Țara Românească, vol. 3, 1526–1535, 449; Năsturel, \*Le Mont Athos et les Roumains\*, 270.](#)
20. [Sullivan, \*The Eclectic Visual Culture of Medieval Moldavia\*, 130–31.](#)
21. [See Alice Isabella Sullivan, “Byzantine Artistic Traditions in Moldavian Church Embroideries,” in “L’évolution de la broderie de tradition byzantine en Méditerranée orientale et dans le monde slave \(1200–1800\),” eds. Joëlle Dalègre, Elena Papastavrou, and Marielle Martiniani-Reber, special issue, \*Cahiers balkaniques\* 48 \(2021\): 125–60.](#)
22. [Neagu Djuvara, \*Între Orient și Occident: Țările române la începutul epocii moderne\* \[Between East and West: The Romanian lands at the beginning of the modern era\] \(Bucharest: Humanitas, 1995\); Claudiu Neagoie, \*Military Organization of Wallachia \(14th–18th Centuries\)/L’organisation militaire de la Valachie \(XIVe–XVIIIe siècles\)\* \(Târgoviște: Cetatea de Scaun, 2021\).](#)
23. [On Neagoie Basarab, see Virgil Câdea, \*Un mare ctitor: Neagoie Basarab, 1512–1521\* \[A great builder: Neagoie Basarab, 1512–1521\] \(Râmnicu Vâlcea: Editura Praxis, 2017\); Sebastian-Laurențiu Nazâr, ed., \*Sfântul Voievod Neagoie Basarab: Ctitor de biserici și cultură românească\* \[Saint voivode Neagoie Basarab: Builder of churches and Romanian culture\] \(Bucharest: Cuvântul Vieții, 2012\); Mihai-D. Grigore, \*Neagoie Basarab—Princeps Christianus\* \(Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2015\); Mihai-D. Grigore, \*Neagoie Basarab—Princeps Christianus: The Semantics of Christianitas in Comparison with Erasmus, Luther and Machiavelli \(1513–1523\)\* \(Oxford: Peter Lang, 2021\).](#)
24. [Câdea, \*Mărturii românești peste hotare\*, II:719.](#)
25. [Virgil Câdea, \*Mărturii românești peste hotare\* \(Bucharest: Editura Biblioteca Bucureștilor, 2011\), III:222.](#)
26. [A \*pomenik\* \(поменникоу; pomelnic\) is a long list of persons, living and deceased including the great patrons of the church or monastery, for whom prayers are offered. Virgil Câdea, \*Mărturii românești peste hotare\* \(Bucharest: Editura Biblioteca Bucureștilor, 2014\), V:28.](#)
27. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, V:32 and 57.](#)
28. [Ioan Moldoveanu, “Sfântul Voievod Neagoie Basarab \(1512–1521\): O specială privire asupra relațiilor sale cu mănăstirile de la Sfântul](#)

- [Munte Athos, la 500 ani de la înscăunarea sa](#) [Saint voivode Neagoe Basarab (1512–1521): A special look at his relations with the monasteries of holy Mount Athos, 500 years after his enthronement], in Nazâru, *Sfântul Voievod Neagoe Basarab*, 97–114.
29. [Câdea, \*Mărturii românești peste hotare\*, II:462–63, 470, 473, 501–2, 519–22, 547, 550, 553, 608.](#)
  30. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, II:599–600.](#)
  31. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, II:578–79.](#)
  32. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, II:582.](#)
  33. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, II:529.](#)
  34. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, II:546.](#)
  35. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, II:423–24.](#)
  36. [Câdea, \*Mărturii românești peste hotare\*, V:486.](#)
  37. [Câdea, \*Mărturii românești peste hotare\*, II:433; Ioli Kalavrezou, “The Reliquary of St. Niphon: Relations between Wallachia, Constantinople, and Mt. Athos,” in \*The Land Between Two Seas: Art on the Move in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, 1300–1700\*, ed. Alina Payne \(Leiden: Brill, 2022\), 239–51.](#)
  38. [On the church at Curtea de Argeș, see Elisabeta Negrău, “The Structure of the Monastery Church from Curtea de Argeș: A Theological Interpretation,” \*European Journal of Science and Theology\* 6, no. 1 \(2010\): 59–66; Emil Lăzărescu, \*Mănăstirea Argeșului\* \[Argeș monastery\], \(Bucharest: Meridiane, 1967\).](#)
  39. [Vasile Grecu, ed. and trans., \*Viața Sfântului Nifon\* \[The life of Saint Niphon\] \(Bucharest: Institutul de Istorie Națională, 1944\).](#)
  40. [Dionysiou Monastery, inv. 753. Mount Athos Repository, accessed 18 May 2023, <https://repository.mountathos.org/jspui/handle/20.500.11957/67669>.](#)
  41. [Corina Nicolescu proposes the period between 1504 and 1506, noting that Theodosius was already born by 1506, so the marriage should have already taken place \(“Princesses serbes sur le trône des Principautés Roumaines. Despina-Militza, princesse de Valachie,” \*Zbornik za likovne umetnosti\* 5 \[1969\]: 97–129, at 104n21\).](#)
  42. [On Mara Branković, see Aleksandar Fotić, “Despina Mara Branković and Chilandar: Between the Desired and the Possible,” in \*Osam vekova Hilandara: Istorija, duhovni život, književnost, umetnost i\*](#)



- arhitektura / Huit siècles du monastère de Chilandar: Histoire, vie spirituelle, littérature, art et architecture; Colloque scientifique international, Octobre 1998* (Belgrade: Balkanološki institut SANU, 2000), 93–100; Mihailo Popović, *Mara Branković: Eine Frau zwischen dem christlichen und dem islamischen Kulturkreis im 15. Jahrhundert* (Mainz: Harrassowitz, 2010).
43. See Lois Jean Drewer, “The Carved Wood Beams of the Church of Justinian, Monastery of St. Catherine, Mount Sinai” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1971); Forsyth and Weitzmann, *Monastery of Saint Catherine at Mount Sinai*; George H. Forsyth, “The Monastery of St. Catherine at Mt. Sinai: The Church and Fortress of Justinian,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 22 (1968): 1–19.
44. Câdea, *Mărturii românești peste hotare*, I:497.
45. Note: Ibid.
46. *Documenta Romaniae Historica, Seria B., Țara Românească, vol. I (1247–1500)*, 453–56.
47. The image is preserved only in the Sinai Archive at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. The photo was taken in 1958 with 5-by-7-inch film in black and white. No. 577816, digital file 15asinai02772, courtesy of the Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expeditions to Mount Sinai. See Alice Isabella Sullivan, “Neagoe Basarab at Sinai,” *Museikon* 5 (2021): 245–48; Alice Isabella Sullivan, “A New Discovery in the Michigan Sinai Archive,” *Visual Resources Collections, University of Michigan* (May 2020).
48. As the oldest among the sons, Theodosius succeeded his father to the throne on 15 September 1521. Unfortunately, he died only a few months after taking the crown, in January 1522. Little is known about Neagoe and Militsa's other two sons, Peter and John. Together with Anghelina, these three children of the royal couple died young. As for the older daughters, it is known that Stana married Moldavia's prince Stephen IV (r. 1517–27), and Roxanda married Radu of Afumați, who took control of Wallachia after Theodosius's death (r. 1522–29), and then she married Radu Paisie (r. 1535–45, with interruptions).
49. On the votive portraits, see Anastasia Văetiși, “Portretistica votivă a lui Neagoe Basarab,” in Nazâru, *Sfântul Voievod Neagoe Basarab*, 185–230.

50. [The Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria documentary expeditions to Mount Sinai are preserved in the Sinai Archives at the University of Michigan and Princeton University. The two archives are in the process of being fully digitized and are available on the new open-access website: <https://www.sinaiarchive.org>. See also Ryan Abramowitz, Elizabeth Elliott, and Alice Isabella Sullivan, "Saint Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai, Egypt," Gods' Collections, ed. Crispin Paine and Jessica Hughes \(October 2023\), <https://www.godscollections.org/case-studies/saint-catherine-monastery-mount-sinai>.](#)

# 11

## GREEK MERCHANTS AND THE GENOESE LOWER DANUBE IN THE LATE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

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This chapter addresses the theme of [Part II](#) of this volume, “Contacts and Patronage Beyond Borders,” by reconstructing how Greek merchants of the Palaiologan period conducted their trade in a geographic context dominated by Latins: the Danube delta after it came under Genoese rule in the second half of the fourteenth century. The text focuses specifically on economic relations in order to define the commercial horizons of merchants between Southeastern Europe and Asia Minor. This approach provides a full explanation of the importance of the late medieval Danube delta as a commercial crossroads between East and West, part of that larger Black Sea region described by Gheorghe Brătianu as a “turntable of international trade.”<sup>1</sup>

The chapter is structured in four parts. The first outlines relations between Constantinople and the city of Genoa in Italy from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries, with specific attention to the rise of Genoese power in the Pontic basin. The second and the third parts provide a portrait of the local Greek community and an overview of Byzantine trade in the Genoese Lower Danube, respectively. The fourth part explores the commercial horizons of Greeks operating in this area from 1360 to 1361.

The research is based on Genoese notary deeds edited in the 1970s and 1980s by Geo Pistarino, Silvana Raiteri, and Michel Balard. This corpus consists of 211 deeds drawn up in Kilia by Antonio di Ponzò (1360–1) and sixteen deeds drawn up in Licostomo by Domenico da Carignano (1373) and Oberto Grassi da Voltri (1383–84).<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, the almost complete loss of Byzantine notarial archives prevents us from integrating the Genoese deeds with similar Greek sources. From a historiographical perspective, this research intends to be a natural continuation of the studies on Byzantine trade and merchants conducted in the past by scholars such as Angeliki Laiou, Cécile Morrisson, Nicolas Oikonomides, and Steven Runciman.<sup>3</sup>

## **Genoa, Byzantium, and the Danube Delta**

Previously an important center of the Byzantine administration in the West (538–643), Genoa developed new relations with Constantinople beginning in the twelfth century. In 1142–43, Genoese ships were already transporting grain from *Romania* to Italy. In 1156, Genoese noblemen went to the Constantinopolitan curia to offer galleys to the *basileus*. By 1160, the citizens of the Italian maritime republic had their own quarter on the Golden Horn, where they sold goods (weapons, clothes) and invested money. Despite the ruthless competition of Pisan and Venetian merchants—who in 1162 and in 1171, respectively, sacked the Genoese colony—the Ligurian merchants strengthened their positions in the empire.<sup>4</sup>

In the following century, the treaty of Nymphaeum (1261), signed by the Nicaean emperor Michael VIII Palaeologus (r. as emperor of Nicaea 1259–61; as Byzantine emperor 1261–82) and the commune of Genoa, assured the Genoese many privileges, including free navigation on the Black Sea.<sup>5</sup>

In a short time, a network of Genoese settlements rose along the coasts of the Pontic basin, from Bulgaria to the Crimea, from Anatolia to the Danube delta, giving the Ligurian merchants commercial supremacy in this region. The most important colonies were at Pera, opposite Constantinople, and at Caffa, in the Crimea, on the border with the Mongol Empire.<sup>6</sup>

Despite continual attacks by Tatars and Turks, these settlements developed further during the fourteenth century, stimulated by the inclusion of local merchants (especially Greeks) in domestic trade on the Black Sea.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the Byzantine-Genoese war of 1351–52 granted Genoa complete control of the Danube delta, with the ancient Byzantine naval port of Licostomo (now disappeared) and the harbor towns of Kilia (now in Ukraine) and Vicina (also disappeared).<sup>8</sup> Genoa maintained possession of this area for many years, before the principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia advanced to the sea and competed for the territory.<sup>9</sup>

During the Genoese period, Kilia, Licostomo, and Vicina were administered by consuls sent annually from the motherland. These consuls were aided by notaries, who were assisted, in turn, by interpreters to facilitate communication among people speaking a wide range of languages, including various Italian dialects, Byzantine Greek, and Cuman (a Turkic language used by Armenians and Tatars).<sup>10</sup>

## A Multicultural Society

About a quarter of the Genoese notary deeds drawn up in Kilia and Licostomo contain references to Greeks living and/or trading in the Lower Danube. Few of those people are explicitly defined as “Greeks” (*Grecha*, *Grechus*), although most can be identified as such based on their names and places of origin.<sup>11</sup> It is noteworthy that, in one of the deeds, the church of St. John, situated in the center of Kilia, is called “St. John of the Greeks” (*ecclesia Sancti Iohannis Grecharum*).<sup>12</sup> This expression shows that for the notary Antonio di Ponzò and his Western clients, in communion with the Catholic Church, the noun “Greek” had not only an ethnic but also a religious meaning, as a synonym of “Orthodox.” The genitive plural feminine *Grecharum*, instead of the genitive plural masculine *Grechorum*, might not be an error by the notary but a way to distinguish a place of

worship attended mainly by women.<sup>13</sup> However, it cannot be determined whether the Greeks who appear in our sources were ethnic Greeks or Grecized locals.

Beyond these issues, the Genoese deeds mention eight former Byzantine subjects resident in Kilia, Licostomo, and Vicina (six men and two women):

Sava Agapi, middleman (*censarius*), inhabitant of Kilia. He was in business with Sava de Chaffa till 10 December 1360, when they dissolved their partnership.<sup>14</sup>

Chaleostirionus Grechus, inhabitant of Kilia, where he owned a house with a courtyard and a boat (*ciguta*) called *St. Nicholas*. On 3 April 1361 he received a certain quantity of silver coins from the Armenian Sarchis in exchange for two and a half cantars of wax.<sup>15</sup>

Evedogia Grecha, living in Kilia, servant of Bernabos de Sancto Stephano, draper, burgess and inhabitant of Pera. On 4 April 1361, she conferred a proxy on Dominicus de Monterubeo in order to redeem a pledge.<sup>16</sup>

Sava, smith in Kilia, where he owned a storehouse (*magassenum*) bordering on the square and the church of St. John. On 5 April 1361, before the Genoese consul in Kilia, the banker Francischus Bustarinus stated he had put in Sava's storehouse 270 pecks (*modia*) of grain bought with money received by Iohannes Tornelus, burgess of Pera, in September 1360.<sup>17</sup>

Michali de Vicina, Greek. On 27 April 1361, in Kilia, he lent four silver bars to the Venetian Petrus de Ognibem.<sup>18</sup>

Theodorus Lambarda, Greek, butcher in Kilia, where he owned a part of a house. On 12 May 1361, he borrowed four silver bars from Daniel de Sorba de Rappalo.<sup>19</sup>

Iane Coschina, son of Georgius, inhabitant of Kilia, where he owned a boat (*ciguta*) called *St. John*. He is mentioned both as a wax merchant

and as a moneylender (1361).<sup>20</sup>

Papadia, living in Licostomo. On 13 September 1373, she stipulated a sale contract with Machitar (the document is acephalous).<sup>21</sup>

A middleman, a wax merchant, a servant, a smith, a moneylender, a butcher, a wax trader and moneylender, and a woman, Papadia, of whom we know little more than her name. Eight simple Byzantine figures through whom we can glimpse the multicultural society formed by Easterners and Westerners characterizing the Genoese Lower Danube.

Some of the trades conducted by Greeks (middleman, moneylender, wax merchant) were quite widespread in the mercantile centers of the Danube delta, from which enslaved people, grain, honey, and wax were shipped to Constantinople and, via Pera, to Italy.<sup>22</sup> The names of boats (*St. John*, *St. Nicholas*) confirm the simple religious faith of their owners, who probably gave their boats the name of a saint to protect them from storms, wrecks, and pirate attacks.<sup>23</sup> In this regard, one of the deeds drawn up in Kilia by Antonio di Ponzò documents the fear created by the pirate galleys of Dobrotitsa, prince of Dobruja, and by Turkish ships (1360).<sup>24</sup> This threat grew in the following decade, when a galley of Dobrotitsa captured the Genoese galley assigned to defend Licostomo (1373).<sup>25</sup>

According to a pivotal study by Laura Balletto, the most common ship dedications in the Genoese Black Sea were to St. Nicholas, a saint venerated in both the East and the West. Less common but also popular dedications were to SS John, Mary, Catherine, or George, the Cappadocian warrior saint whose cult spread in Liguria in the Byzantine period (538–643).<sup>26</sup> Later, Genoa adopted the red-on-white cross associated with St. George as its ensign.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to the residents, the Genoese sources mention a relatively large number of Greeks coming to the Danube delta from every corner of the Black Sea and beyond. Among them, the majority were shipowners and merchants.

## **Traveling Merchants**

Between September 1360 and May 1361, the deeds drawn up by Antonio di Ponzò document the presence, in Kilia and Licostomo, of thirty-eight nonresident men explicitly defined or identifiable as Greeks:

Triffo Sineto, inhabitant of Constantinople, co-owner and co-master with Nicolaus de Mayrana, inhabitant of Pera, of a boat (*lignum de orlo*) called *St. Mary*. On 3 September 1360, in Kilia, Triffo and Nicolaus affreighted their boat to Nicolaus Griti, inhabitant of Pera, to carry seventy pecks (*modia*) of grain to Constantinople. The contract was stipulated in the presence of Iane Apostoli de Constantinopoli, steersman (*nauclerus*), Iane Bagadoli, inhabitant of Constantinople and scribe on board, and some sailors of the boat.<sup>[28](#)</sup>

Ianulli de Spiga son of the late Georgius, co-owner and co-master with the Genoese citizen Iohanes Picembonus of a boat (*lignum*) called *St. Nicholas*. On 7 September 1360, in Kilia, Ianulli and Iohanes borrowed a certain quantity of silver bars from Francinus de Corsio and the Genoese citizen Daniel Pilavicinus. They promised to repay the loan within fifteen days after the arrival of their boat, loaded with grain, in Pera.<sup>[29](#)</sup>

Constantinus Mamali de Constantinopoli. On 19 September 1360, in Kilia, he bought sixty pecks (*modia*) of grain from Theodorus de Caffa, inhabitant and burgess of Kilia.<sup>[30](#)</sup>

Theodorus Piro and Ianinus de Trapesunda, son of the late Anthonius, inhabitants of Constantinople, owners and masters of a boat (*lignum de orlo*) called *St. George*. On 23 September 1360, in Kilia, they borrowed a certain quantity of silver bars from Georgius de Sancto Georgio, burgess and inhabitant of Pera, and from Ianinus Surianus, inhabitant of Constantinople. They promised to repay the loans within fifteen and ten days, respectively, after the arrival of their boat in Constantinople and Pera.<sup>[31](#)</sup>

Theodorus Manasi de Constantinopoli, master of a boat (*lignum*) called *St. John*. On 15 October 1360 his boat, loaded with grain, was



about to sail from Licostomo to Pera.<sup>32</sup>

Theodorus de Vighinico, inhabitant of Constantinople, co-owner and co-master with Iacobus Sparano de Gayta, also inhabitant of Constantinople, of a boat (*lignum de orlo*) called *St. Nicholas*. On 20 October and 27 October 1360, in Kilia, Theodorus and Iacobus borrowed a certain quantity of silver bars from the Genoese citizen Anthonius Marocelus and his brother, Lodixius Marocelus, burgess and inhabitant of Pera. They promised to repay the loans within fifteen and twenty days, respectively, after the arrival of their boat in Pera.<sup>33</sup>

Calo Iane Arnichita, burgess of Caffa, owner and master of a boat (*lignum de orlo*) called *St. John*. On 21 October and 29 October 1360, in Kilia, he borrowed a certain quantity of silver bars from the Genoese citizen Obertus Ususmaris. He promised to repay the loans within fifteen days after the arrival of his boat, loaded with grain, in Pera.<sup>34</sup>

Manoli Malagamba de Enio and Michali Radino de Enio. On 27 October 1360, in Kilia, they lent a certain quantity of silver bars to Iacobus de Montanexi, a Genoese citizen, and to Manuel de Vultabio, a burgess of Pera, owners and masters of a boat (*lignum de orlo*) called *St. John*. On 28 October 1360, also in Kilia, Michali Radino de Enio lent a certain quantity of silver bars to Fredericus de Orto, burgess and inhabitant of Pera, owner and master of a boat (*lignum de orlo*) called *St. John*.<sup>35</sup>

Andronicus Foscho de Symisso, son of the late Constantinus, co-owner of a boat (*lignum de orlo*) called *St. John*, whose master was Nicho Ianachi de Symisso. On 28 October 1360, in Kilia, Andronicus borrowed a certain quantity of silver bars from Triandaffolo de Symisso, caulker, Constantinus Cropolo, and Caloiane Chalezo, all from Samsun (Symisso). He promised to repay the loan within ten days after the arrival of his boat in Samsun.<sup>36</sup>

Fotis Orendis de Trapessunda son of the late Rendis. On 28 January 1361, in Kilia, he sold to Iohannes Iambonus, burgess and inhabitant of Pera, half of the boat (*ciguta*), called *St. Theodore*, he owned together with the Armenian Sarchis.<sup>37</sup>

Ianachi Playti de Chirisunda, Iane Mamaloti de Chirisunda, Nichita Mauro de Chirisunda, Nichita Pistizo de Chirisunda, and Sava Azamati de Chirisunda, co-owners with Pellegrinus Daniel, citizen and inhabitant of Savona, of a boat (*lignum de orlo*) called *Jesus Christ*. On 8 March 1361, in Kilia, Nichita de Ghirisunda and Sava Azamati borrowed a certain quantity of silver bars from Iane Coschina, son of Georgius, inhabitant of Kilia. They promised to repay the loan within ten days after the arrival of their boat in Pera. The document does not specify if Nichita de Ghirisunda was Nichita Mauro or Nichita Pistizo. On 22 March 1361, Iane Mamaloti and Nichita Mauro, through the Genoese citizen Iohannes Durantis, paid the notary Anthonius de Sancto Matheo, inhabitant of Pera, 220 hyperpers for an exchange contract. On 25 March 1361, Sava Azamati and Ianachi Playti borrowed a certain quantity of silver bars from Michali de Solario de Cembaro, inhabitant of Kilia. They pledged to repay the loan within ten days after the arrival of their boat in Pera. On 2 April 1361, before the notary Antonio di Ponzò, Pellegrinus Daniel reported that Sava Azamati and Nichita Pistizo had loaded onto the boat a quantity of grain larger than allowed.<sup>38</sup> According to Angeliki Laiou, “the Greeks were, presumably, sailors on this boat and also owned some shares in it, a procedure common among the Genoese.”<sup>39</sup>

Costa Pasquali de Trapessunda, shipwright. On 2 April 1361, in Kilia, he lent a certain quantity of aspers to Iohannes Iambonus, inhabitant of Pera.<sup>40</sup>

Theodorus de Maocastro, son of the late Michali Osgoragi, and Theodorus Canavori de Constantinopoli. On 5 April 1361, in Kilia, they loaded ninety-five and a half pecks of grain onto a boat (*ciguta*)

called *St. Nicholas*, whose owner and master was Michael de Recho, inhabitant of Moncastro (*Maocastrum*). They promised to pay transport costs—corresponding to one hyperper and fourteen carats of gold for each peck of grain—within ten days after the arrival of the boat in Constantinople.<sup>41</sup>

Manoli de Romania, son of the late Manirianus, miller. On 5 April 1361, in Kilia, he rented a mill, a house and four horses for three years from the banker Francischus Bustarinus. The mill and the house were situated in *Bruschaviza*, in *territorio Pendavogni*. Manoli also received a silver bar on loan from Francischus.<sup>42</sup>

Ianinus de Folia Nova, son of the late Macronus, inhabitant of Sozopol. On 12 April 1361, in Kilia, he lent a certain quantity of silver bars to the Genoese citizens Branchaleonus de Guisulfis and his brother, Cristianus de Guisulfis, owner and master of a boat (*lignum de orlo*) called *St. John*.<sup>43</sup>

Calo Iane Francopolo de Andreanopoli and Calo Iane Vassilico de Andreanopoli, Greeks, partners in business. From 26 April to 10 May 1361, in Kilia, they lent silver bars to many Genoese and Venetian shipowners who transported grain and other goods from Kilia to Pera.<sup>44</sup> According to Nicolas Oikonomides, these two moneylenders moved from East Thrace to Kilia because they wanted to invest their capital better than they could in Adrianople, whose countryside was exposed to Turkish raids.<sup>45</sup>

Michali Esteghano de Spiga. On 4 May 1361, in Kilia, he bought a lot of wine from Manuel de Riparolio, inhabitant of Constantinople.<sup>46</sup>

Calo Iane de Mexembre, Greek, son of the late Papa Leo. On 5 May 1361, in Kilia, he loaded 157 pecks (*modia*) of grain on a boat (*lignum parvum sive ciguta de orlo*) called *St. Gregory* or *St. George*, whose owner and master was Anthonius de Finario. At the same time, Calo Iane borrowed a certain quantity of silver from Anthonius, promising to repay the loan in Nesebar (*Mexembre*), Sozopol (*Susopori*) or

Ahtopol (*Gatopoli*), where the boat would berth. As security for his debt, he offered his grain loaded on board. At the place of arrival, Calo Iane would also pay Anthonius transport costs amounting to one hyperper and thirteen carats of gold for each peck of grain.<sup>47</sup>

Giossaffa Tovassilico Caloiatos, monk of St. Athanasius, co-owner and co-master with Symon Sardus de Recho of a boat (*lignum de orlo*) called *St. Athanasius*. On 8 May 1361, in Kilia, Giossaffa borrowed a certain quantity of silver bars from Symon. He promised to repay the loan within fifteen days after the arrival of their boat in Pera.<sup>48</sup> As Nicolas Oikonomides rightly observed, the true co-owner of the boat had to be the monastery of St. Athanasius, since Giossaffa, as a monk, could not have personal property.<sup>49</sup>

Georgius Rondachino de Constantinopoli, son of Nichita. On 11 May 1361, in Kilia, he lent a certain quantity of silver bars to the Venetian Bonsegnorius de Murano, owner and master of a boat (*lignum de orlo*) called *St. John the Baptist*.<sup>50</sup>

Theodorus Agalo de Constantinopoli, Greek. On 12 May 1361, in Kilia, he received seventeen silver bars on loan from the Genoese citizen Iacobinus de Casteliono. As security for his debt, he offered twenty butts of Greek wine. Iapino Conduro de Constantinopoli acted as an interpreter between Theodorus and Iacobinus.<sup>51</sup>

Manoli Offilimas de Constantinopoli. On 12 May 1361, in Kilia, he bought a thirteen-year-old Tatar slave called Taytana from the Tatar Daoch.<sup>52</sup>

Theodorus Lipato de Constantinopoli, son of the late Serundinus, owner and master of a boat (*lignum de orlo*) called *St. John*. In May 1361, in Kilia, he borrowed a certain quantity of silver bars from Lodixius de Onigio and Nicolaus Portonarius, burgesses and inhabitants of Pera. He promised to repay the loan within fifteen days after the arrival of his boat in Pera.<sup>53</sup>

As these short profiles show, sixteen of these men were owners and/or masters of commercial boats that mostly shuttled between the Lower Danube and the Golden Horn. At least nine out of sixteen were involved in the grain trade. Besides shipowners and shipmasters, there are eight moneylenders, four grain merchants, two wine merchants, two craftsmen in shipbuilding (a shipwright and a caulker, also active as moneylenders), two seamen (a steersman, a scribe on board), a miller, and even a monk. They came principally from Constantinople and, to a lesser extent, from various places on the Black Sea, the Sea of Marmara, and the Aegean: Moncastro (*Maocastrum*), at the Mouth of the Dniester, and Caffa, in the Crimea; Samsun (*Symisso*), Giresun (*Chirisunda*), and Trebizond (*Trapesunda*), on the northern Anatolian coast; Nesebar (*Mexembre*) and Sozopol (*Susopori*), on the Bulgarian shore; Cyzicus (*Spiga*), on the Sea of Marmara; Enez (*Enio*), on the northeastern Aegean coast, and Adrianople (*Andreanopoli*), in East Thrace.<sup>54</sup>

Very often, they used a small sailboat with raised edges (*lignum de orlo*) that could transport from fifty to one hundred tons of goods. It was much larger than the small river boat (*ciguta*) typical of the Danube and normally used by local merchants.<sup>55</sup> The presence in Kilia of a shipwright from Trebizond and a caulker from Samsun was perhaps linked to the town's shipyard (*uscharium*).<sup>56</sup>

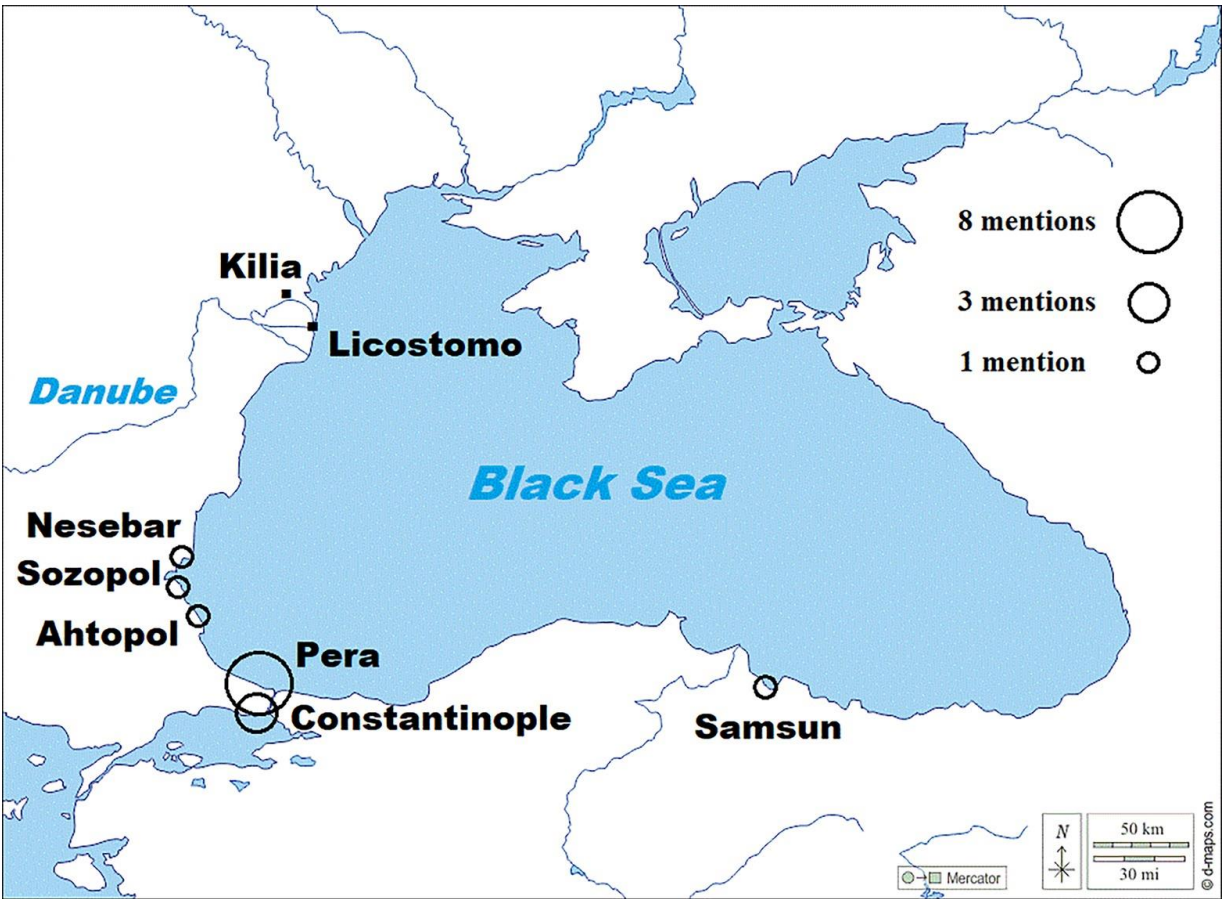
Shipowners often operated with Westerners coming from Liguria (Genoa, Recco, Savona) and southern Italy (Gaeta). Fotis Orendis de Trapessunda, who owned a boat together with the Armenian Sarchis, a big wax and honey trader, was probably an exception. Moneylenders offered silver bars and coins indifferently to the Genoese and their Venetian rivals. Merchants were especially active in the grain trade—essential supplies for the Byzantine capital—but also in the wine trade. In addition to local consumption, the Greek wine arriving in Kilia was perhaps intended for the Bulgarian and Wallachian aristocracies that shared the Lower Danube with the Genoese.<sup>57</sup> Greek wine withstood the competition from Tuscan wine imported by Italian merchants.<sup>58</sup> There is also a noteworthy reference to the slave trade, although we do not know if the Tatar girl bought by Manoli Offilimas worked in his house or was resold in Kilia, Constantinople, or elsewhere.

In general, this overview of Greek trade in the Danube delta does not differ much from the picture outlined by Runciman and other scholars regarding the entire Black Sea. According to Oikonomides, between the thirteenth and the fifteenth centuries, Greek shipowners and merchants, often in partnership with Italians, were very active in collecting raw materials along the Black Sea coasts and bringing them to Constantinople and Pera, where they entered the circuit of large-scale international trade.<sup>59</sup> Laiou and Morrisson point out that Byzantine merchants came not only from Constantinople and the rest of the empire but also from Genoese colonies, such as Caffa. They were usually “people with small or in any case limited capital,” dealing mostly “in grain of various kinds” and sailing “in relatively small ships.”<sup>60</sup> Runciman observes that, in the fourteenth century, Greek traders normally bought ships with which they imported grain and then resold them at the end of season.<sup>61</sup>

The commercial horizons of merchants are the area where our sources can still bring something new. Embracing the Bulgarian Empire and the Empire of Trebizond, these horizons extended far beyond the narrow confines of *Romania* and the Genoese colonies of the Black Sea.

### **From the Balkans to Asia Minor**

If we consider the destinations of boats owned or co-owned by the Greeks present in Kilia and Licostomo from 1360 to 1361, we find, first of all, Pera and Constantinople (eight and three mentions, respectively), followed by Nesebar, Sozopol, Ahtopol, and Samsun (one mention each). These place names reveal that the boats sailed along two different trade routes: the shipping route linking the Lower Danube with the Bulgarian shore and the Golden Horn—traveled especially by merchants from Constantinople but also from Caffa, Cyzicus, Giresun, Moncastro, and Nesebar—and the maritime route between the Danube delta and the northern Anatolian coast, covered by traders from Samsun ([Maps. 11.1–11.2](#)). Already described by the Arab geographer Muhammad al-Idrisi in the twelfth century, these routes were definitely very old.<sup>62</sup>



[Map 11.1](#) [Destinations of boats owned or co-owned by Greeks in Kilia and Licostomo, 1360–61.](#)

Source: [https://d-maps.com/carte.php?num\\_car=4446&lang=en](https://d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=4446&lang=en).



[Map 11.2](#) [Places of origin of Greek merchants operating in the Danube delta, 1360–61.](#)

Source: [https://d-maps.com/carte.php?num\\_car=4446&lang=en](https://d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=4446&lang=en).

Cross-referencing this information with the places of origin of moneylenders, coming mostly from East Thrace ([Map. 11.3](#)), we can confirm that the commercial horizons of Greeks operating in the Danube delta embraced a wide area, ranging from the Aegean to the Black Sea: an area that belonged to the Byzantine Empire prior to the thirteenth century and in the early 1360s was divided between Byzantium (Adrianople, Constantinople, Enez), the Second Bulgarian Empire (Ahtopol, Nesebar, Sozopol), the Genoese Commonwealth (Caffa, Kilia, Licostomo, Moncastro, Pera, Samsun, Vicina), the Empire of Trebizond (Giresun, Trebizond), and the Ottoman Turks (Cyzicus).<sup>63</sup>





[Map 11.3](#) [Places of origin of Greek moneylenders active in the Danube delta, 1360–61.](#)

Source: [https://d-maps.com/carte.php?num\\_car=4446&lang=en](https://d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=4446&lang=en).

As for traded goods, resident merchants were mainly interested in beeswax, a product coming to the Danube delta from Bulgaria and, probably, also from Hungary and the Romanian lands. It was used in candle making, in caulking, and even had pharmaceutical applications.<sup>64</sup> Nonresident merchants were mainly attracted by an equally profitable product: grain. In 1361, for example, wheat bought in Kilia could yield 337.5 percent if resold in the Cretan market.<sup>65</sup> Both wax and grain reflected the productive vocation of the Lower Danube—even now one of the breadbaskets of Europe—and, at the same time, the supply needs of Byzantium and the West.

Although diminished compared to previous centuries and limited by the robust, mercantile capitalism that was developing in Italy, Greek trade still had remarkable vitality in the Danube delta.<sup>66</sup> Under the banner of St. George, Byzantine merchants could still do excellent business in this area, a hundred years before the growing Turkish threat would lead to the fall of Constantinople (1453) and of the Greek Empire of Trebizond (1461).

The results of the research encourage further study of the Greek trade in the Lower Danube beyond the Genoese period, drawing from written sources but also from other material evidence, such as the tombstone of Thomas, son of Ioannes, a merchant from Neochori (1689), discovered by Nicolae Iorga inside the church of St. Nicholas in Kilia.<sup>67</sup>

## Notes

1. [Gheorghe Ion Brătianu, “La mer Noire, plaque tournante du trafic international à la fin du Moyen Âge,” \*Revue Historique du Sud-Est Européen\* 21 \(1944\): 36–69. I am grateful to Serena Acciai, Vladislav Grešlík, Maria Alessia Rossi, and Alice Isabella Sullivan for their helpful suggestions during the writing of this chapter.](#)
2. [Geo Pistarino, \*Notai genovesi in Oltremare. Atti rogati a Chilia da Antonio di Ponzò \(1360–61\)\* \(Bordighera: Istituto Internazionale di Studi Liguri, 1971\); Silvana Raiteri, “Atti rogati a Licostomo da Domenico da Carignano \(1373\) e Oberto Grassi da Voltri \(1383–84\),” in Giovanna Balbi and Silvana Raiteri, \*Notai genovesi in Oltremare. Atti rogati a Caffa e a Licostomo \(sec. XIV\)\* \(Bordighera: Istituto Internazionale di Studi Liguri, 1973\), 187–237; Michel Balard, \*Gênes et l’Outre-Mer\*, vol. 2, \*Actes de Kilia du notaire Antonio di Ponzò 1360\* \(Paris: Mouton Éditeur and the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1980\).](#)
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33. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, docs. 101, 114.](#)
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12

# MEDIEVAL WALL PAINTINGS IN TRANSYLVANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCHES

Signs of Cross-Cultural Interactions

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Transylvania is a historical and geographic region of Romania, roughly bounded by the arc of the Carpathians and the Apuseni Mountains.<sup>1</sup> In the Middle Ages, it constituted the eastern part of the multiethnic Hungarian Kingdom. Transylvanian wall paintings represent most of the preserved visual sources for the Orthodox in late medieval Hungary.<sup>2</sup> The paintings are also valuable because they complement the medieval written sources about the Romanians, which are relatively scarce. Investigating the iconography allows us to enhance our knowledge about the donors, who were mostly members of the local Romanian elite. The wall paintings reflect their special situation as Byzantine rite Christians who lived in a Catholic kingdom. The Romanian Orthodox elite strove to protect and

improve their social status while preserving their religious beliefs or avoiding religious persecution. The mixture of Western and Eastern stylistic and iconographic elements in the paintings they commissioned reflect local cultural interactions and sometimes denote ways in which the donors adapted to Hungarian society. The murals are among the oldest preserved in Orthodox churches in the whole territory inhabited by Romanians in the Middle Ages. Most of them date to the end of the fourteenth and the first half of the fifteenth centuries, a period from which few paintings are preserved in Wallachia and Moldavia. It is also difficult to relate the Transylvanian murals to those from other regions inhabited by Orthodox people because of their peculiar features and fragmentary preservation. However intriguing these paintings are, the paucity of written sources about the donors invites cautious interpretations, bearing in mind the necessity of future adjustments.

The present chapter is an introduction to the subject of medieval Transylvanian paintings in Orthodox churches. After an outline of the historical background, I illustrate the special characteristics of these paintings through the interpretation of several iconographic topics in relation to their historical contexts. The first group of subjects—the donor portraits, military saints, holy kings of Hungary, and St. Helena with the Cross—can be closely related to the historical situation of the time and the social aspirations of the donors. The iconographic programs, particularly in the sanctuary, and partially also the stylistic traits of the paintings reflect a certain knowledge of Byzantine tradition in church decoration. Some peculiar subjects may also evoke contemporary religious issues. The chapter closes with a few remarks about the paintings' stylistic variety and their mixture of Byzantine and Western traits.

## **The Historical Context**

In the late medieval Hungarian Kingdom, the majority of people who followed Eastern Christianity were Romanian, along with southern and eastern Slavs. The Romanians inhabited Transylvania proper and the neighboring areas. As the Hungarian occupation and organization of the region extended and consolidated, local social and political structures were gradually integrated into the administrative and political system of the

kingdom.<sup>3</sup> Judging by the preserved Latin sources, the leaders of the Romanians (the knezes) had different social and economic statuses depending on the historical period and the lands they inhabited.<sup>4</sup> Usually they held lands under certain obligations, meaning they had to pay dues in kind and money and to provide various services, primarily military. The evolution of the social and political system of the Hungarian Kingdom was detrimental to their landholding and institutions. Some knezes succeeded in climbing the social ladder and reached the status of a noble with full rights (“true noble” / *verus nobilis*) but the majority lost their properties and became tenant peasants. The main path to social advancement was loyal service to the king, especially via military service, and most of the knezes who moved upward in the social hierarchy were from the estates of the royal castles.<sup>5</sup> On the contrary, the knezes who, in the late Middle Ages, lived on the lands of the Catholic Church or on private lands had diminished rights and a worse evolution.

An important obstacle to the social and political advance of the knezes was their adherence to the Orthodox Church.<sup>6</sup> Sources suggest that especially from the time of King Louis I (r. 1342–82), conversion to Catholicism became a condition for landownership.<sup>7</sup> Louis I was a fervent supporter of the Latin Church and was determined to convert the schismatics and heretics in his kingdom and the neighboring regions to the Latin faith. The support he gave to the Catholic Church complemented his interest in political and territorial expansion to the east and south.<sup>8</sup> King Sigismund of Luxemburg (r. 1387–1437) was rather tolerant of the Orthodox Church in Hungary, and he thought that the Church Union was necessary to support a common Christian front against the Ottomans.<sup>9</sup> Hungary had faced the direct threat of the Ottomans since the end of the fourteenth century and played an important role in halting their advances for almost a century. Romanians also participated in the battles and were rewarded for their bravery. Many knezes from the Banat and Hațeg Land, who were faithful servants of John Hunyadi (d. 1456), a noble of Romanian origin who became regent of Hungary and was a leading figure of the anti-Ottoman wars, particularly prospered as a result of their contribution to the fight against the Ottomans.

The Franciscan order, which was very active in the region in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, was on a mission to convert the pagans and schismatics and to preach in support of the Crusades.<sup>10</sup> Surviving written sources show the Franciscans' disapproval and intransigence about Orthodox practices and beliefs.<sup>11</sup> However, in critical moments of the anti-Ottoman fight, they also tempered their zeal in order to secure a cohesive Christian front.<sup>12</sup> The Church Union, preceded by long discussions and finally agreed upon at the Council of Ferrara-Florence (1438–39), enjoyed some success in Hungary, but the extent and depth of its implementation are difficult to assess.<sup>13</sup> Some sources indicate resistance to Union and failure to follow its decisions. At least formally, however, Church Union benefited the Romanian elite because it eliminated their status as tolerated or sometimes persecuted schismatics. It is possible that some Romanians remained in the Catholic Church after the Union failed. In general, social and political advantages played a crucial role in conversion, although there were certainly also genuine conversions due to religious conviction.<sup>14</sup> By the end of the fifteenth century, a portion of the Romanian knezes and nobles had converted to Catholicism, but the situation was mixed throughout the Romanian-inhabited region.<sup>15</sup>

After the Ottoman victory in the Battle of Mohács (1526) and the dissolution of the medieval Hungarian Kingdom, the newly formed Principality of Transylvania (1541) was ruled for almost two centuries by Reformed princes. From the middle of the sixteenth to the end of the seventeenth centuries, the Romanians became people of interest to the Protestants—first the Lutherans and then the Calvinists.<sup>16</sup> The Reformation had some success among the Romanian elite. Late medieval and premodern sources show that the upper strata of the Romanians, those who acceded to the ranks of middle and high nobility, also adhered to Catholicism or Reformed Christianity and eventually fully assumed Hungarian identity.<sup>17</sup> Eastern Orthodoxy remained a tolerated confession outside the constitutional system of the Principality of Transylvania, and it was therefore an obstacle to the social and political evolution of the Romanians.

Few sources have been preserved about the organization of the Orthodox Church in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>18</sup> The authority of the Wallachian and Moldavian Churches over the Orthodox in certain regions

in Transylvania is occasionally mentioned in the sources. Over time, the amount of evidence about the protection and support of the Wallachian and Moldavian princes and boyars for the Romanians in Hungary increased. The metropolitan Orthodox see in Transylvania was eventually established at Alba-Iulia, the residence of the Transylvanian prince, where it was, for the first time, mentioned in the 1570s.

In the late Middle Ages and the early modern period, the relationship of the Orthodox in Transylvania and the neighboring counties with the patriarchate of Constantinople was mediated mainly through the Wallachian and Moldavian Churches, but sometimes direct contacts are also documented.<sup>19</sup> In 1391, the Romanian patrons of the monastery in Hrušovo (Rom. Peri; Hung. Szentmihálykörtvényes), then situated in Máramaros county, requested and received from Patriarch Anthony IV the stauropegial rank for the foundation of their family. At the same time, the abbot of the monastery received the title of patriarchal exarch over several territories in northeastern Hungary.<sup>20</sup> The patriarch of Constantinople was also approached, in the seventeenth century, by the Calvinist prince of Transylvania, Gabriel Bethlen (r. 1613–29). The prince wanted to convert the Romanians to Calvinism and asked Patriarch Cyril Loukaris, without success, to support his plans and intervene with Gennadius, the metropolitan of Alba-Iulia.<sup>21</sup>

The Serbs in the Hungarian Kingdom also belonged to Orthodox Christianity. They used to live along the southern frontier, but an important Serb migration to the north started after the battle of Kosovo Polje (1389).<sup>22</sup> Serbian rulers—Despot Stefan Lazarević (r. 1389–1427) and Despot Đurađ Branković (r. 1427–56)—and members of the high nobility came with their retinues and received from the king estates and offices in exchange for their loyalty and support in the anti-Ottoman fight. Common people also moved into the Hungarian Kingdom, in multiple waves. They fled from the Turks, colonized deserted territories in the Hungarian Kingdom, and played an important military role. Despot Đurađ Branković proved to be a resolute and astute supporter of the Orthodox faith. The sources suggest that he also encouraged resistance to Church Union.<sup>23</sup> A great number of Serbs also settled in Hungary at the time of King Matthias Corvinus (r. 1458–90). They kept in touch with their Church hierarchy in the Ottoman occupied

territories, and due to their military role and importance in the colonization of deserted territories, their faith was tolerated.

## **The Medieval Orthodox Churches**

Around twenty medieval churches preserve, in a fragmentary state, wall paintings that were commissioned or we may assume were commissioned by Orthodox donors between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries.<sup>24</sup> The majority of these churches were founded by and belonged to the Romanian knezes who lived on the estates of royal castles. The sources also reveal a few cases when formerly Catholic churches were given to Orthodox knezes or nobles to use. It has been argued that the use of Catholic churches by the Orthodox was possible in the context of the Church Union or when a settlement got depopulated and the feudal lord decided to transfer the use of the church to the Orthodox.<sup>25</sup>

Building masonry churches required significant material resources, and the Romanians were largely poor. Most medieval Romanian churches in the Hungarian Kingdom were made of wood.<sup>26</sup> All of the medieval wood churches and part of the Orthodox masonry churches have fallen into ruin, were rebuilt, or were destroyed in the modern period. Certain restrictions also existed in the Middle Ages about building Orthodox churches in brick or stone. One of the decrees promulgated by the General Synod of Buda in 1279 forbade schismatic priests in Hungary from officiating in churches and having or building new oratories or chapels without the approval of the bishops in whose dioceses they lived.<sup>27</sup> However, material evidence shows that these restrictions were not always and everywhere applied.

## **Donor Portraits and Inscriptions**

The portraits of the *ktetors* and their dedicatory inscriptions are preserved in several churches.<sup>28</sup> Evidence suggests that the donors were usually a single family or a few related families. The dedicatory inscriptions invoke God's help in this life and ask for redemption. The votive composition, in which the donors present the church to the patron saint, has been partially preserved in the church of the Dormition of the Virgin at Crișcior, the

church of St. Nicholas at Ribița, the church of St. George at Streisângeorgiu, the church of St. Nicholas at Leșnic, the church of the Dormition of the Virgin at Hălmagiu, and the church of St. Nicholas at Bârsău. The state of conservation of the Transylvanian paintings is relatively poor but allows for some observations. The members of the families were depicted in full figure in a place of high visibility, in the lower register of the naos. The composition of the scenes is typical of the votive paintings in late medieval Orthodox murals, of which many examples have been preserved in Serbian and Bulgarian churches. However, four of the paintings—at Ribița ([Figure 12.1](#)), Crișcior, Streisângeorgiu (the layer from 1408), and Leșnic—roughly dated to the first half of the fifteenth century, share some special features.



[Figure 12.1](#) Votive composition, early fifteenth century, church of St. Nicholas, Ribița (Hunedoara county).

*Source:* Alutanus Restauri.



In three cases, and maybe all four—the painting at Streisângeorgiu was repainted in 1743—the adult donors are depicted kneeling with straight backs.<sup>29</sup> Such a pose is unusual in monumental votive compositions and raises the question of a possible influence of Western models.<sup>30</sup> At Ribița and Crișcior, and most probably also in the other two churches, the male donors wear an overgarment that was popular in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries in Central and Western Europe. The wide outer garment with full open or bag-shaped sleeves was known by various names (*houppelande*, *Tappert*, etc.) and was worn by wealthy people.<sup>31</sup> The men were also depicted wearing belts with bladed weapons. The paintings of Ribița and Crișcior preserve the original appearance of these weapons, which look like battle knives or single-edged swords. In Byzantine painting, donors were not commonly depicted wearing arms, but such attributes are usual in Western representations of noblemen, as distinctive elements of noble or knightly dress. In the Transylvanian context, the belt together with the bladed weapon may be interpreted as a sign of the knezes' military duty, wealth, and privileged status. The donors' straight-cut, ear-length hair, and short beards were also fashionable in late medieval Central Europe.<sup>32</sup> Fifteenth-century female dress can be examined in more detail only in the votive painting of Ribița, in the case of the little girl Ana, who likewise wears a *houppelande*-type of dress. Western European but this time Renaissance fashion was also adopted at least by one of the Serbian female donors in the sixteenth-century votive composition at Bârsău.<sup>33</sup>

In some churches, there are no images of the *ktetors* or the images have not been preserved, but their names and contributions are recorded in inscriptions. At Streisângeorgiu, the dedicatory inscription from 1313–14 is surprising due to its position and relatively large size. It is located in front of the altar table, where eucharistic themes are commonly depicted and tells that the knez Balea (or Balotă) made or repaired the church asking for God's help, the forgiveness of his sins, and redemption. The inscription also mentions the names of the priest and of the painter. At Hălmagiu, the contribution of the first *ktetors*, dating to around 1400 or the first half of the fifteenth century, was recorded on the triumphal arch, under the depiction of the Last Judgment. Situated in a highly visible place, it takes an unconventional formula: “By the hand of Župan Moga and [that] of his

brother they made it again.” In some churches—at Ribița, Densuș, and Leșnic—there are also short supplicatory inscriptions that accompany some images of saints. The supplicants were probably lesser donors who commissioned depictions of saints to whom they had a special devotion.

### **The Military Saints**

Among the holy figures that are painted in the Transylvanian Byzantine-rite churches, the military saints frequently stand out due to their place and number. They are a common presence in the naos of Orthodox churches in general, but in some Transylvanian churches the warrior saints on horseback draw special attention. In these small sacred spaces, their presence is highly visible. In the church at Streisângeorgiu, two military saints on horseback are depicted on the lower register of the south and north walls of the sanctuary, a place usually occupied by officiating bishops. In the church at Leșnic, two unidentified equestrian saints and St. George fighting the dragon, depicted above the portrait of the donor, were painted in the upper register of the north wall of the naos. In the church at Ribița, two equestrian saints, one of them St. George fighting the dragon, occupy a relatively large space on the lower register of the naos, next to the holy kings of Hungary and opposite the votive composition. In the church at Crișcior, SS Demetrius and Theodore on horseback and St. George fighting the dragon are also placed in the lower register of the naos, in close relationship to the image of the *ktetors* and the holy kings of Hungary.

In Christian tradition, the warrior saints were venerated as protectors and role models for those who fought against the enemies of the Christian faith and people. In the East, a multiplication of depictions of equestrian saints has usually been noted in border regions and in regions of contact with the Crusaders.<sup>34</sup> Transylvania was both a border region and a region of close contact between Orthodox and Catholic people. The accentuated presence of the equestrian saints in these Transylvanian churches can be related to the military history of the region, in which the Ottoman advance played a central role, and to the military role of the knezes. The knezes fought as cavalymen and, as has been noted, the main means by which they advanced in social status was faithful service to the king, primarily military

service, which was increasingly needed as the Ottoman threat grew. Donation charters specifically reward the fidelity, bravery, and self-sacrifice of the knezes, which were also knightly virtues shared as norms by the whole nobility of the kingdom.<sup>35</sup> Military service was the emblematic duty of the nobles. Thus, the prominent presence of the equestrian saints in these churches alludes to both the military challenges of the period and to the social status and aspirations of the knezes.

### **The Holy Kings of Hungary**

Although St. George was highly venerated and frequently depicted in medieval Catholic churches in Hungary, just as he was elsewhere in the West, the saint who most fully embodied the virtues of the Christian knight for the Hungarians was King Ladislas I (r. 1077–95). Laid to rest in the cathedral he founded at Oradea and canonized in 1192, he came to be venerated as the ideal Christian knight and defender of the country, especially against heathen invaders.<sup>36</sup> A popular episode in his legend, his fight with the Cuman, showed Ladislas as a champion against pagans and an exemplar of chivalric virtues. The story was painted in dozens of Hungarian Catholic churches in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>37</sup> Although there were knezes and Romanian nobles who bore the name Ladislas—and therefore it has been assumed that they had a personal devotion toward the holy king<sup>38</sup>—depictions of the popular legend of Ladislas's fight with the Cuman have not been preserved, if they ever existed, in any medieval Orthodox church. However, the group of the so-called three holy kings of Hungary—King Stephen, King Ladislas, and Prince Emeric—was painted in the churches of Ribița and Crișcior ([Figure 12.2](#)).<sup>39</sup>



[Figure 12.2](#) [SS Stephen, Emeric, and Ladislas, church of the Dormition of the Virgin, ca. 1400, Crișcior \(Hunedoara county\).](#)

Source: Elena-Dana Prioteasa.

King Stephen I (r. 997–1038), the first king of Hungary, who was canonized in 1083, was venerated as the founder of the Hungarian

Kingdom, lawgiver, wise ruler, and apostle of the Hungarians. Stephen's son Emeric died young and was canonized in 1083, venerated as a model of a pious and chaste prince. The cult of SS Stephen, Emeric, and Ladislas, initiated by the Árpád dynasty, gradually spread to the lower levels of society and, at the end of the Middle Ages, both the aristocracy and the lesser nobles regarded the three holy kings as the patron saints of the Hungarian Kingdom and as exemplars of rulers. Individually or as a group, they were depicted in numerous churches.<sup>40</sup> The presence of the three kings in the churches of Ribița and Crișcior has been variously interpreted. Some historians assumed that the knezes were obliged to paint the holy kings if they wanted to build churches in stone.<sup>41</sup> Other scholars considered their depiction as proof that the knezes venerated the kings as patrons of the country and wanted to follow the example of the Hungarian nobility.<sup>42</sup> It has also been inferred that, aside from being loyal to the Hungarian crown, these knezes regarded the holy kings as originators and guarantors of their privileges.<sup>43</sup> At the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth centuries, when these churches were built and painted, the voivodes of Crișcior and Ribița were landowners with limited privileges, and their land was part of the royal estate of the castle of Șiria. Along with other Romanians and Hungarians of similar social status, they were probably remainders of the ancient castle warriors who were in danger of losing their possessions and, as other privileged groups also did, invoked the blessed and holy kings (*divi reges, sancti reges*) as the originators and guarantors of their rights and freedoms.<sup>44</sup>

The close association of the *ktetors'* portraits with the image of the three Hungarian kings also has a parallel in Byzantine art and the art that followed the Byzantine tradition, where the practice of pairing the portraits of the *ktetors* with those of rulers was well established. It has been argued that the image of the ruler expressed his authority over the donors, the donors' gratitude or allegiance, or the legitimacy of their power and office. The pairing of donor with ruler could even have worked as a confirmation or acknowledgment of a land or church grant.<sup>45</sup>

### **St. Helena with the Holy Cross**

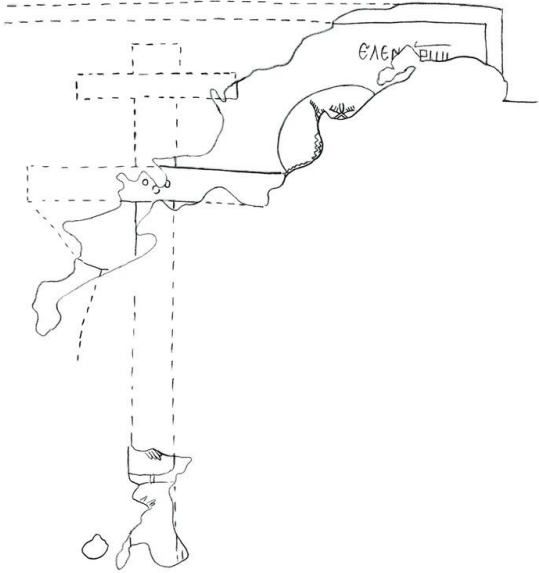
The association of the rulers with the Holy Cross and with the image of SS Constantine and Helena as role models was common in the paintings of Orthodox churches.<sup>46</sup> At Ribița and Crișcior, next to the sanctuary and the holy kings of Hungary, there is a partially preserved scene that can conventionally be called the Exaltation of the Holy Cross because glorifying the cross was its main message ([Figures 12.3](#) and [12.4](#)). However, the full compositional schema remains unknown to us. The paintings included Empress Helena supporting the cross but also secondary figures who usually appear in the scene of the Finding of the Holy Cross. The fragments at Crișcior show that there was another main character symmetrically supporting the cross together with St. Helena. He could have been St. Constantine or a bishop. Iconographic details in both paintings show the influence of Western models.<sup>47</sup>





Figure 12.3 The Exaltation/Finding of the Holy Cross, early fifteenth century, church of St. Nicholas, Ribița (Hunedoara county).

Source: Elena-Dana Prioteasa.



*Figure 12.4* The Exaltation/Finding of the Holy Cross, ca. 1400, church of the Dormition of the Virgin, Crișcior (Hunedoara county).

*Source:* Elena-Dana Prioteasa.

Images of SS Constantine and Helena with the cross were frequently represented in medieval Orthodox churches, unlike the Exaltation or the Finding of the Holy Cross. Their message was multifarious and related both to the history and symbolism of the cross and to the cult of the emperor and empress. In the West, St. Helena was usually shown holding the cross as her main attribute, but Constantine was seldom depicted. Narrative cycles inspired by the history of the cross were widespread in the West in the late Middle Ages.<sup>48</sup> Shorter or more developed versions of the Legend of the Holy Cross appeared in various artistic media and carried theological, devotional, and political messages related to increased devotion to the Passion of Christ, the veneration of relics of the True Cross, calls to pilgrimage, routes to the Holy Land, imperial ideology, and crusading propaganda, in which the Franciscans also played an important role. St. Helena with the Holy Cross, sometimes as a protagonist in the scene of the Finding of the Holy Cross, were painted in many medieval churches in the Hungarian Kingdom at the end of the fourteenth and in the first half of the fifteenth centuries.

One of the reasons that motivated the popularity of such subjects could have been the Ottoman threat. However, there were certainly other aspects of the cult of St. Helena and the Holy Cross that motivated their frequent depiction in churches, such as the saint's patronage of certain occupations and protection against various misfortunes, the special devotion to the Passion of Christ that characterized the high and late Middle Ages, and the local or regional presence and veneration of the relics of the cross. The preserved historical information does not easily allow us to understand the specific intentions of the commissioners or painters or the perception of the audience. Given the contextual data, one can infer that the association of the Holy Kings of Hungary, who hold cross-inscribed shields, with themes related to the cross in the churches at Ribița and Crișcior evoked at least some notions that were also shared by the Catholics in Hungary: namely,



the kings as models of Christian rulers and defenders of Christianity, and the cross as the promise and instrument of Christian victory against any evil, including the Ottomans.<sup>49</sup>

### **Special Features of the Iconographic Programs**

Transylvanian paintings are preserved in fragmentary states. Therefore, we can make only limited observations with regard to the iconographic programs and must practice caution with generalizations. The factors that played a role in the choice and disposition of the subjects were the plan and size of the churches, the training of the painters, and the choices of the clergy and donors. The churches were small, with rectangular naos, frequently covered by a wooden ceiling, and a rectangular, semicircular, or polygonal vaulted sanctuary. Often a western tower is also present. When the paintings' style is in the Byzantine tradition and of good quality, the program usually stays close to the Byzantine canon, as at, for example, Colț Monastery, Densuș, or Bârsău. When the painters were trained in a Gothic style, such as at Strei and Hălmațiu, the iconography shows the influence of Western art in regard to the program and individual subjects. There are also paintings that can be characterized as generally Byzantine in style, but with some Western stylistic and iconographic features, for example at Ribița, Crișcior, and Remetea. In general, one can note a certain freedom from canons, the adoption of Western elements, and the use of some ancient formulae in the decoration of the churches.

The common requirements for the decoration of the naos seem to have been broadly respected, by representing scenes from the life of Christ in the upper registers and individual saints in the lower register of the walls. Nevertheless, narrative scenes, even from the life of Christ, sometimes break into the lower register, echoing the freedom in the program that characterized Latin churches. Transylvanian paintings usually also stay close to the iconographic program of the Orthodox sanctuary, which is traditionally highly conservative. However, in five churches—Streisângeorgiu, Strei, Ribița, Hălmațiu, and Densuș, painted in widely different styles, from Gothic to late Palaiologan—the uppermost zone of the sanctuary is decorated with Christ in Glory or Christ Pantokrator instead of

the well-established post-Iconoclastic decoration with the image of the Virgin with Child ([Figure 12.5](#)). The reason for such a choice is difficult to specify, but several factors may be considered. The churches have no dome, and the image of Christ, usually depicted in the dome, could have been moved to the highest zone of the sanctuary.<sup>50</sup> The Western models, carried by painters who worked in a Western style, as at Strei and Hălmagiu, could have been gradually adopted in Orthodox churches. Christ in Glory, the typical decoration for the Romanesque sanctuaries, has survived into the Gothic period, particularly in Central Europe, with many examples preserved also on the territory of medieval Hungary.<sup>51</sup> Finally, it has also been argued that the pre-iconoclast decoration of the conch survived—albeit in a different form, with the image of Christ as Pantokrator or in the Deesis—in the periphery of Byzantium, up to the late Middle Ages.<sup>52</sup>



[Figure 12.5](#) [View of the sanctuary, church of the Dormition of the Virgin, late fourteenth century, Strei \(Hunedoara county\).](#)

Source: Elena-Dana Prioteasa.

The Communion of the Apostles, frequently represented in the upper register of Orthodox sanctuaries from the thirteenth century on, was also painted at Densuș, Colț Monastery, and Bârsău.<sup>53</sup> However, at Strei and Sântămăria Orlea, the Apostles are depicted in a row, holding books or scrolls or conversating. This type of representation was used in numerous Catholic sanctuaries in medieval Hungary and is one of the Western iconographies that entered the Orthodox churches.<sup>54</sup>

From the end of the eleventh century, the composition of the celebrating bishops gradually became the typical decoration of the lower register of the Orthodox sanctuary.<sup>55</sup> It showed the holy bishops depicted in three-quarter poses, turning to the east and holding open scrolls with texts from the Divine Liturgy. From the thirteenth century on, the image of the Christ Child lying on a paten or directly on the altar table (the *Amnos*) was commonly depicted to the east, as the focal point of this ceremony. The painters of the Transylvanian churches represented the celebrating bishops with some variation in regard to the posture of the celebrants and the central eucharistic theme. Many times, the bishops were not depicted in a three-quarter pose but rather frontally, holding books or scrolls. The frequently rectangular plan of the sanctuaries and the training of the painters probably led to this change. In the Gothic paintings of Strei, five of the bishops are also shown frontally, while the sixth, St. John (probably Chrysostom), is kneeling and holding an open book. The four bishops on the south and north walls—SS Nicholas, Peter, Kalinik, and an unknown bishop—have next to them images of Romanesque churches. Bishop Kalinik is a particularly interesting figure because a hierarch with this name is not commonly included among representations of bishops in Byzantine churches. As one of merely six bishops depicted in the sanctuary, he must have had particular significance to the donors, parishioners, or clergy. Next to the picture of his church, the preserved Slavonic inscription reads: “The church of Bishop Kalinik.” Rather than identifying him with a relatively little-known patriarch of Constantinople (who was in office from 693 to 705), the figure may represent a bishop of the same name with local or regional importance, about whom no other sources have yet emerged.<sup>56</sup>

Additionally, at Strei, in the middle of the lower register, the painter did not paint the *Amnos* but a Man of Sorrows with open eyes and many

bleeding wounds. The Man of Sorrows was, for the Byzantines, a symbolic image of the Passion and played an important role in Passion rituals.<sup>57</sup> The image also had eucharistic meaning, being frequently depicted in the prothesis niche or the prothesis chapel.<sup>58</sup> It was only rarely included on the east wall of the sanctuary, amid the officiating bishops.<sup>59</sup> In the West, the Man of Sorrows had a strong eucharistic significance and was an important devotional image. The special cult of the Passion and Eucharist in the late Middle Ages led to an emphasis on Christ's bleeding wounds. Sometimes he was also represented with his eyes open, highlighting Christ's victory over death and the role of the Eucharist as his living and life-giving body. In Catholic churches in medieval Hungary, the subject was frequently represented in the sanctuary, most often in relation to the tabernacle and the sacristy but sometimes also above or below the eastern window, in a location similar to the one at Strei.<sup>60</sup> The decoration of the east wall of the sanctuary of Strei with the Man of Sorrows was a mediating solution between the Western iconographic language and the requirements of the Orthodox program. The Man of Sorrows had an important devotional function and was frequently represented also in the nave or the exterior walls of the churches. At Strei, he appears again in the lunette above the western entrance to the church, accompanied by instruments of the Passion.

The clumsy painting of the sanctuary of Streisângeorgiu (1313–14) illustrates quite a free approach to the decoration of this liturgical space. In front of the altar table, where one would expect a eucharistic image, stands the dedicatory inscription, mentioning the names of the donor, knez Balea (or Balotă); the priest, Naneș; and the painter, Teofil. To the right and left stand two, frontally depicted bishops, holding closed books and giving a blessing. Two warrior saints on horseback are painted on the north and south walls. They are unusual additions to this liturgical space, and their presence here must be related to their special veneration by the *ktetor*.

Another theme borrowed from the Western iconographic language is the Lamb of God, which was painted amid the prophets on the soffit of the triumphal arch at Ribița, Hălmagiu, and possibly also at Streisângeorgiu. After the Quinisext Council (691–92) recommended that Christ should be depicted in his human form and not as a lamb, this image almost disappeared from the Christian art of the East up until the fall of

Byzantium.<sup>61</sup> In the West, however, the Agnus Dei remained in use. In Latin churches, including churches in the Hungarian Kingdom, the Lamb of God can be frequently seen in the upper zones of the sanctuary, as a eucharistic and eschatological symbol. With this significance, it is also a suitable depiction at the entrance of Orthodox sanctuaries.

Transylvanian churches also include rare or apparently unique iconographies. One example is a scene that has been preserved on the south walls of the sanctuaries of Ribița ([Figure 12.6](#)) and Hălmagiu. It resembles the Vision of St. Peter of Alexandria but has St. Nicholas as the main protagonist. It shows the saint giving a blessing in the direction of a eucharistic chalice while at his feet a figure, in all probability Arius, falls headfirst downward. Both paintings are accompanied by partially preserved inscriptions that refer to the saint as a defender of the Holy Trinity. Similar to the Vision of St. Peter, the scene with St. Nicholas asserts the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist as both God and man and condemns those who, by denying Christ's divinity, implicitly contest the validity of the Eucharist.<sup>62</sup> In the Middle Ages, it was believed that St. Nicholas participated in the First Council of Nicaea (325), where he also confronted Arius. The bishop was highly venerated as an ideal model for hierarchs and defender of Christian dogma, particularly of the Trinitarian doctrine. The special attention he enjoyed at Ribița and Hălmagiu was also due to the fact that he was the patron saint of the two churches in the Middle Ages. The scene at Hălmagiu, painted in a Gothic style, also resembles Latin paintings illustrating the consecration of the Host and the doctrine of the Real Presence.<sup>63</sup> Although there were attempts to attract the schismatics in the Hungarian Kingdom to the Latin cult of the Eucharist, the image at Hălmagiu cannot be, by itself, proof of Orthodox interest in this aspect.<sup>64</sup> The formal similarity could have solely been due to the training of the painter. Also, a precise target of the antiheretical message is difficult to identify because of the paucity of sources closely related to the area where the churches were situated. Nevertheless, dualist heresies have been documented for the late Middle Ages in the neighboring regions of Banat and Wallachia. The Romanians in the Hungarian kingdom were occasionally accused of contacts with dualist heretics.<sup>65</sup> The Orthodox in the kingdom were also criticized because of particular “errors” and

“heresies” of their faith and liturgical practice, although their basic education as Christians and their belief in the Holy Trinity were appreciated.<sup>66</sup> Both at Ribița and Hălmagiu, the scene with St. Nicholas was depicted next to the authors of the two main Byzantine liturgies, St. Basil the Great and St. John Chrysostomos. [Here insert the following new endnote: The two bishops can be easily identified at Hălmagiu, where their naming inscriptions have been partially preserved. At Ribița, the fragmentarily preserved figure of a bishop recently uncovered next to St. Basil the Great depicted in all probability St. John Chrysostomos, who does not normally miss from any sanctuary decoration.] The special iconography and association of subjects could be interpreted as an affirmation of the orthodoxy of faith and liturgical practice. Whether this was a response to contacts with dualist heretics or to Latin accusations, it is difficult to ascertain. The case of the scene at Ribița and Hălmagiu is emblematic for the difficulties scholars face in finding a firm interpretation for the iconographic peculiarities of the Transylvanian paintings, due to the many and partially known factors that played a role in their shaping.



[Figure 12.6 St. Basil the Great \(to the left\) and scene with St. Nicholas and falling Arius, early fifteenth century, church of St. Nicholas, Ribița \(Hunedoara county\).](#)

Source: Elena-Dana Prioteasa.

### **Notes on the Style of the Paintings**

Although scholars tend to analyze style separately from iconography, it is an intrinsic and closely related component of painting. Besides the donors, the painters, their training, and the circulation of models played essential roles in shaping church decoration. A few names of painters and apparently also one self-portrait have been preserved in Transylvanian Orthodox churches, but the artists' places of origin or training are difficult to determine. Art historians have long highlighted the variety of styles, and newly restored works allow new contributions.<sup>67</sup> The overall picture, however, remains inhomogeneous. The paintings preserved in the churches

of Colț Monastery, Densuș, and Ostrov were executed in a late Palaiologan style. The murals in the nave of Hălmagiu and in the church of Bârsău date to the post-Byzantine period. The scarcity of paintings dating from the fourteenth and much of the fifteenth centuries preserved in Wallachia and Moldavia makes it difficult to establish relations with these regions. Some of the post-Byzantine paintings in the nave of Hălmagiu show similarities with Moldavian paintings from the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth centuries. In some cases, the historical context suggests a possible presence of Serbian painters, as, for example, at Bârsău, where the female *ktetors* were of Serbian origin. Along with the painters who showed a good knowledge of Byzantine tradition, there were painters who worked in a Gothic style and decorated the churches of Strei and Hălmagiu (the sanctuary and the triumphal arch). Whether they were commissioned to decorate a Byzantine-rite church because they were easily available or for some other reason remains unknown. In these churches, the Western iconographic vocabulary was adapted to the requirements of an Orthodox church.

Finally, there were fifteenth-century painters whose style largely followed the Byzantine tradition but had assimilated some Western stylistic and iconographic features. They worked in the churches at Crișcior, Ribița, Zlatna, Densuș (the decoration of the pillars), and Remetea. Some of these paintings also show close stylistic and/or iconographic similarities and suggest a workshop and models that lasted in the region for some time. There were also Catholic churches in Transylvania that were painted between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in styles showing a strong Byzantine component that had incorporated Western features.<sup>68</sup> It is possible that painters who worked in these styles were also commissioned by Orthodox donors or transmitted their models to the Orthodox milieu. The place of origin of the Byzantine-Western synthesis that can be seen in Transylvanian Orthodox churches was not always and necessarily Transylvania itself.

## Conclusion



Transylvanian paintings are important sources for a relatively little-documented milieu: that of the Romanian knezes in the Hungarian Kingdom. The churches with their murals are representative of the knezes' social and economic status and their religious life. From an aesthetic point of view, the paintings are rarely of good quality, but their value lies primarily in the historical information they can transmit. They reflect both resilience and adaptation on multiple levels: the knezes' relationship with the political power, their social standing, their adherence to the Orthodox Church and Byzantine tradition, their spiritual and material concerns, the training of the painters and their following the Byzantine canon. The present chapter has selected a few subjects illustrating these interactions while others await further analysis and integration into the larger historical context.

## Notes

1. [In a wider sense, which is occasionally admitted, the name Transylvania designates a wider area, which includes the regions of Maramureș, Crișana, and Banat.](#)
2. [For reasons of expediency, throughout this chapter, I use two terms that are not original to the medieval period although they are commonly used in historical literature: “Orthodox” for people and churches that followed the Byzantine rite and “Catholic” for those following the Latin rite. It should also be noted that, due to the limited amount of historical data, it is not always clear if and to what extent some “Orthodox” Romanians, i.e., Romanians following the Byzantine rite, were subordinated to the Latin Church.](#)
3. [Ioan-Aurel Pop and Thomas Năgler, eds., \*The History of Transylvania\* \(Cluj-Napoca: Romanian Academy, 2010\), 1:257–60.](#)
4. [From the rich bibliography on the social history of the Romanian elite, see Marius Diaconescu, ed., \*Nobilimea românească din Transilvania\* \[The Romanian nobility in Transylvania\] \(Satu Mare: Editura Muzeului Sătmărean, 1997\); Ioan Drăgan, \*Nobilimea românească din Transilvania, 1440–1514\* \[The Romanian nobility in Transylvania, 1440–1514\] \(Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2000\); Cosmin Popa-](#)

- Gorjanu, “From kenezii to nobiles Valachi: The Evolution of the Romanian Elite of the Banat in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries,” *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU* 6 (2000): 109–28; Martyn Rady, *Nobility, Land and Service in Medieval Hungary* (London: Palgrave, 2000), 90–95.
5. Drăgan, *Nobilimea românească din Transilvania*, 120, 220; Ioan-Aurel Pop, “Elita românească din Transilvania în secolele XIII–XIV (origine, statut, evoluție)” [The Romanian elite in Transylvania in the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries (origin, status, evolution)], in Diaconescu, *Nobilimea românească din Transilvania*, 36–63, at 47.
  6. Pop, “Elita românească din Transilvania,” 38–47.
  7. Viorel Achim, “Catholicismul la românii din Banat în evul mediu” [Catholicism and the Romanians in the Banat in the Middle Ages], in *Banatul în evul mediu. Studii* [The Banat in the Middle Ages: Studies] (Bucharest: Albatros, 2000), 145–60, at 149–54; Drăgan, *Nobilimea românească din Transilvania*, 175–78.
  8. See, for example, Șerban Papacostea, *Geneza statului în evul mediu românesc* [The genesis of the state in the Romanian Middle Ages] (Bucharest: Corint, 1999), 92–103; Ioan-Aurel Pop, “Ethnie et confession: Genèse médiévale de la nation roumaine moderne,” in *Ethnie et confession en Transylvanie (du XIIIe au XXe siècles)*, eds. Nicolae Boșan, Ioan Lumperdean, and Ioan-Aurel Pop (Cluj-Napoca: Centrul de Studii Transilvane, Fundația Culturală Română, 1996), 5–60, at 23–33.
  9. On the attitude of King Sigismund toward the Orthodox see, e.g., Dan Ioan Mureșan, “Une histoire de trois empereurs: Aspects des relations de Sigismond de Luxembourg avec Manuel II et Jean VIII Paléologue,” in *Emperor Sigismund and the Orthodox World*, eds. Ekaterini Mitsiou et al. (Vienna: ÖAW, 2010), 41–101, at 62–96.
  10. Viorel Achim, “Ordinul franciscan în țările române în secolele XIV–XV: Aspectele teritoriale” [The Franciscan Order in the Romanian countries, fourteenth to fifteenth centuries: Territorial aspects], *Revista istorică* 7, nos. 5–6 (1996): 391–410; Marie-Madeleine de Cevins, *Les franciscains observants hongrois de l’expansion à la débâcle: vers 1450–vers 1540* (Rome: Istituto Storico dei Cappuccini, 2008).

11. [Papacostea, \*Geneza\*, 96–102, 226–37; Marius Diaconescu, “Les implications confessionnelles du Concile de Florence en Hongrie,” \*Mediaevalia Transilvanica\* 1, nos. 1–2 \(1997\): 29–62, at 38–46; Stanko Andrić, “Saint John Capistran and Despot George Branković: An Impossible Compromise,” \*Byzantinoslavica\* 74 \(2016\): 202–27, at 205–7, 215–17.](#)
12. [Diaconescu, “Implications confessionnelles,” 46.](#)
13. [On the effects and limits of the Church Union in Transylvania, see especially Diaconescu, “Implications confessionnelles” Adrian Andrei Rusu, \*Ioan de Hunedoara și românii din vremea sa\* \[John Hunyadi and the Romanians of his time\] \(Cluj-Napoca: Editura Presa Universitară, 1999\), 77–127; Iulian-Mihai Damian, “Unire bisericească și societate creștină în regatul Ungariei la mijlocul secolului XV” \[Church Union and Christian society in the Hungarian Kingdom at the middle of the fifteenth century\], \*Crisia\* 28 \(2008\): 49–64.](#)
14. [Achim, “Ordinul franciscan în țările române,” 401.](#)
15. [Drăgan, \*Nobilimea românească din Transilvania\*, 178–85.](#)
16. [Ioan-Aurel Pop, Thomas Năgler, and András Magyar, eds., \*The History of Transylvania\* \(Cluj-Napoca: Romanian Academy, 2009\), 2:255–69; Pop, “Ethnie et confession,” 42–53.](#)
17. [Pop, “Elita românească din Transilvania,” 52–53; Drăgan, \*Nobilimea românească din Transilvania\*, 259–61, 278–312; Rusu, \*Ioan de Hunedoara\*, 197–232.](#)
18. [For the history of the Transylvanian Orthodox Church in the late Middle Ages, see Mircea Păcurariu, \*Istoria Bisericii Românești din Transilvania, Banat, Crișana și Maramureș\* \[The history of the Romanian Church in Transylvania, the Banat, Crișana, and Maramureș\] \(Deva: Editura Episcopiei Devei și Hunedoarei, 2018\); Cristian-Nicolae Daniel, “Coping with the Powerful Other: A Comparative Approach to Greek-Slavonic Communities of Rite in Late Medieval Transylvania and the Banat” \(PhD diss., Central European University, Budapest, 2014\).](#)
19. [Ioan-Aurel Pop, “Il patriarcato di Constantinopoli e la chiesa ortodossa della Transilvania \(XIV–XVII sec.\),” in \*Le patriarcat œcuménique de Constantinople aux XIVe–XVIe siècles: Rupture et continuité. Actes du colloque international, Rome, 5–6–7 décembre 2005\*, ed. Frantz Olivié](#)

- (Paris: Centre d'études byzantines, néo-helléniques et sud-est européennes, E.H.E.S.S., 2007), 103–15.
20. Pop, [“Il patriarcato di Constantinopoli,”](#) 110, with further bibliography.
  21. Note: [Ibid.](#), 103–5.
  22. [Sima Ćirković, “Seobe srpskog naroda u Kraljevinu Ugarsku u XIV i XV veku” \[The migrations of the Serbian people to the Hungarian kingdom in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries\], in \*Seobe srpskog naroda od XIV do XX veka\* \[The migrations of the Serbian people from the fourteenth to the twentieth century\], ed. Dragutin Ranković et al. \(Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, 1990\), 37–46; Péter Rókay, “A szerbek betelepülése Magyarországra a XV. században” \[The settlement of Serbs in Hungary in the fifteenth century\], in \*A Szerbek Magyarországon: Die Serben in Ungarn\*, ed. István Zombori \(Szeged, 1991\), 51–63; Nenad Lemajić, “The Serbian Population of the Banat and the Western Mureş Basin in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries \(and Its Local and Military Leaders\),” in \*The Cultural and Historical Heritage of Vojvodina in the Context of Classical and Medieval Studies\*, ed. Đura Hardi \(Novi Sad: Filozofski Fakultet, 2015\), 205–22.](#)
  23. [On Đurađ Branković's stance toward the Union and the Latin Church, see Andrić, “Saint John Capistran” Diaconescu, “Implications confessionnelles,” 38–41.](#)
  24. [The church of St. George in Streisângeorgiu, Hunedoara County \(1313–14, 1408\), the church of the Dormition of the Virgin in Strei, Hunedoara County \(second half of the fourteenth century\), the church of the Pentecost in Ostrov, Hunedoara County \(second half of the fourteenth or the beginning of the fifteenth century\), the church of the Dormition of the Virgin in Crişcior, Hunedoara County \(beginning of the fifteenth century\), the church of St. Nicholas in Ribiţa, Hunedoara County \(beginning of the fifteenth century\), the church of St. Nicholas in Leşnic, Hunedoara County \(probably the first half of the fifteenth century\), the church of St. Nicholas and Prophet Jeremiah in Densuş, Hunedoara County \(by 1443\), the church of the Dormition of the Virgin in Hălmagiu, Arad County \(first phase: around 1400 or the first half of the fifteenth century; second phase: end of the fifteenth or the first decades of the sixteenth century\), the church of Zlatna, Alba](#)

County (ca. 1424), the Reformed church in Chimindia, Hunedoara County (first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> c.), the Monastery of Colț (Râu de Mori-Suseni), Hunedoara County (fifteenth century), the Reformed church in Sântămăria Orlea, Hunedoara County (the Apostles in the sanctuary and possibly a donor composition under the gallery, after 1447 and by 1484), the Reformed church in Remetea, Bihor County (first half of the fifteenth century), the monastery of Râmeț, Alba County (fourteenth to sixteenth century), the church of St. George in Lupșa, Alba County (fifteenth century), the church of St. Nicholas in Bârsău, Hunedoara County (second half of the sixteenth century). Fragments of frescoes were also recovered during archaeological excavations at the ruined church of Răchitova (fifteenth century). Small fragments of wall paintings have been described also in the following churches: the church of St. Elijah in Peșteana, Hunedoara County, the church of St. George in Sânpetru, Hunedoara County, the ruined church in Gârbova de Sus, Alba County, the ruined church of Lopadea Veche, Alba County, and possibly also in the church of the Birth of the Virgin in Galda de Jos, Alba County. The churches have a rich literature, among the most important contributors being I. D. Ștefănescu, Virgil Vătășianu, Vasile Drăguț, Marius Porumb, and Ecaterina Cincheza-Buculei. As the space of this chapter is limited, for a detailed bibliography, see two works of synthesis: Marius Porumb, *Dicționar de pictură veche românească din Transilvania, secolele XIII–XVIII* [Dictionary of old Romanian painting in Transylvania, thirteenth to eighteenth century] (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 1998); and Răzvan Theodorescu and Marius Porumb, eds., *Arta din România: Din preistorie în contemporaneitate* [Art in Romania: From prehistory to contemporaneity], vol. 1 (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 2018). In this study, I refer to the churches using their present-day dedication.

25. Rusu, Ioan de Hunedoara, 268–70.
26. Note: Ibid., 270–82; László Makkai and András Mócsy, eds., *History of Transylvania*, vol. 1, *From the Beginnings to 1606* (Highland Lakes, NJ: Atlantic, 2001), 573–75.

27. [Șerban Turcuș, \*Sinodul general de la Buda \(1279\)\* \[The General Synod of Buda \(1279\)\] \(Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2001\), 65–67, 212.](#)
28. [For a detailed analysis of most of the portraits that are discussed here and for the dedicatory and donor inscriptions, see Elena-Dana Prioteasa, \*Medieval Wall Paintings in Transylvanian Orthodox Churches: Iconographic Subjects in Historical Context\* \(Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române; Cluj-Napoca: Mega, 2016\), 30–53, 147–90. See Dragoș Gh. Năstăsoiu, “The Social Status of Romanian Orthodox Noblemen in Late Medieval Transylvania according to Donor Portraits and Church Inscriptions,” \*Études Byzantines et Post-Byzantines\* 7 \(2016\): 205–65.](#)
29. [The repainted votive composition of Streisângeorgiu shows a partial understanding of the original, but suggests the latter was similar to the votive paintings of Ribîța and Crișcior. The votive painting of Leșnic is presently quite damaged, but a drawing after the painting published in 1981 suggests the posture and dress of the male donor was similar to Ribîța and Crișcior \(Ecaterina Cincheza-Buculei, “Implicații sociale și politice în iconografia picturii medievale românești din Transilvania, secolele XIV–XV. Sfinții militari” \[Social and political implications in the iconography of Romanian medieval painting in Transylvania, fourteenth–fifteenth centuries: The military saints\], \*Studii și cercetări de istoria artei. Seria Arta plastică\*, 28 \(1981\): 3–34, plate II\).](#)
30. [The common kneeling posture in Byzantine art was that of the \*proskynesis\*, in which the torso leaned forward, up to full prostration \(Ioannis Spatharakis, “The Proskynesis in Byzantine Art,” \*Bulletin Antieke Beschaving\* 49 \(1974\): 190–205\). Kneeling with a straight back was the common pose for supplicants in medieval Western art, from the thirteenth century on; see Premyslav Mrozowski, “Genuflexion in Medieval Western Culture: The Gesture of Expiation—The Praying Posture,” \*Acta Poloniae Historica\* 68 \(1993\): 5–26. For examples of donor portraits in Catholic churches in medieval Hungary, see Ernő Marosi, ed., \*Magyarországi művészet, 1300–1470 körül\* \[Fine arts in Hungary, ca. 1300–1470\] \(Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1987\), 119–21.](#)

31. [Erika Thiel, \*Geschichte des Kostüms: Die europäische Mode von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart\* \(Berlin: Henschel, 2000\), 127, 133, 142, 146.](#)
32. [Thiel, \*Geschichte des Kostüms\*, 129.](#)
33. [Ileana Burnichioiu, “Revenirea la un subiect fără surse: Biserica din Bârsău în secolele XV–XVI” \[Return to a subject without sources: The church of Bârsău in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries\], \*Mediaevalia Transilvanica\* 5–6 \(2001–2\): 97–112, at 104; Thiel, \*Geschichte des Kostüms\*, 172–74.](#)
34. [Tania Velmans, \*Rayonnement de Byzance\* \(Paris: Thalia Édition, 2006\), 50–53, 63–64; Mat Immerzeel, “Divine Cavalry: Mounted Saints in Middle Eastern Christian Art,” in \*East and West in the Crusader States: Context-Contacts-Confrontations\*, eds. Krijnie Ciggaar and Herman Teule \(Leuven: Peeters, 2003\), 3:265–86; Sharon E. J. Gerstel, “Art and Identity in the Medieval Morea,” in \*The Crusades from the Perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim World\*, eds. Angeliki E. Laiou and Roy Parviz Mottahedeh \(Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2001\), 263–85. Ecaterina Cincheza-Buculei also noted the abundance of military saints in Transylvanian churches \(Cincheza-Buculei, “Implicații.”\). However, she interpreted the prominence of the equestrian saints as an encoded message of hostility toward the Hungarian authority, who threatened the religious confession and national identity of the Romanians \(Ibid.\). In my opinion, such a hypothesis cannot be supported if one takes into consideration the social and political situation of the knezes and their military role.](#)
35. [Rady, \*Nobility, Land and Service\*, 129–31.](#)
36. [The bibliography on the three Arpadian saints Stephen, Ladislas, and Emeric is extensive, but for an introduction to their cult, see Gábor Klaniczay, \*Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses: Dynastic Cults in Medieval Central Europe\* \(Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000\).](#)
37. [For a recent overview of the topic, with previous bibliography, see Zsombor Jékely, “Narrative Structure of the Painted Cycle of a Hungarian Holy Ruler: The Legend of Saint Ladislas,” \*Hortus Artium Medievalium\* 21 \(2015\): 62–74.](#)

38. [Szilveszter Terdik, “A magyar szent királyok ábrázolásai román orthodox templomokban” \[The representations of the holy kings of Hungary in Romanian Orthodox churches\], in \*Szent Imre 1000 éve\*, ed. Terézia Kerny \(Székesfehérvár: Székesfehérvári Egyházmegyei Múzeum, 2007\), 96–98, at 97.](#)
39. [The three saints were also depicted in the now Reformed churches of Chimindia \(Hunedoara County\) and Remetea \(Bihar County\), in the first half of the fifteenth century, probably at a time when Byzantine-rite services were held in the two churches. The historical contexts are different from Ribița and Crișcior and need further research.](#)
40. [Terézia Kerny, “A magyar szent királyok tisztelete és ikonográfiája a XIV. század közepéig” \[The cult and iconography of the holy kings of Hungary until the middle of the fourteenth century\], in \*Szent Imre 1000 éve\*, ed. Terézia Kerny \(Székesfehérvár: Székesfehérvári Egyházmegyei Múzeum, 2007\), 73–82; Terézia Kerny, “A magyar szent királyok tisztelete és ikonográfiája a XIII. századtól a XVII. századig,” \[The cult of the holy kings of Hungary from the thirteenth to the seventeenth century\], in \*Az ezeréves ifjú: Tanulmányok Szent Imre herceg 1000 évéről\* \[The one-thousand-years-old youth: Studies on the one thousand years of Holy Prince Emeric\], ed. Tamás Lőrincz \(Székesfehérvár: Szent Imre-templom, 2007\), 79–123; Dragoș Gh.Năstăsoiu, “Between Personal Devotion and Political Propaganda: Iconographic Aspects in the Representation of the ‘sancti reges Hungariae’ in Church Mural Painting \(fourteenth century–early sixteenth century\)” \(PhD diss., Central European University, Budapest, 2018\), \[https://www.etd.ceu.edu/2018/nastasoiu\\\_dragos-gheorghe.pdf\]\(https://www.etd.ceu.edu/2018/nastasoiu\_dragos-gheorghe.pdf\).](#)
41. [Silviu Dragomir, “Vechile biserici din Zarand și ctitorii lor în secolele 14–15” \[The ancient churches of Zarand and their ktetors in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries\], \*Anuarul Comisiunii Monumentelor Istorice: Secția pentru Transilvania\*, 1929 \(Cluj: Tip. Cartea Românească, 1930\), 223–64, at 235–36.](#)
42. [Ernő Marosi, “Der Heilige Ladislaus als ungarischer Nationalheiliger: Bemerkungen zu seiner Ikonographie im 14.–15. Jh.,” \*Acta Historiae Artium\* 33 \(1987–88\): 211–56, at 230, 232, 245.](#)
43. [Adrian A. Rusu, “Românii din Regatul Ungariei și cetățile medievale \(Privire specială asupra secolelor XIII–XIV\)” \[The Romanians in the](#)



- [Hungarian kingdom and the medieval castles \(Special look at the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries\)\], \*Mediaevalia Transilvanica\* 7/8, nos. 1–2 \(2003–4\): 85–106, at 95. See also Drăgan, \*Nobilimea românească din Transilvania\*, 211.](#)
44. [Drăgan, \*Nobilimea românească din Transilvania\*, 210–11. For a detailed discussion of this subject, see Prioteasa, \*Medieval Wall Paintings\*, 69–71.](#)
  45. [Gordana Babić, “Peintures murales byzantines et de tradition byzantine \(1081–1453\): Possibilités et limites des analyses sociologiques,” in \*Eighteenth International Congress of Byzantine Studies, 8–15 August 1991\* \(Moscow: Byzantinorossica, Saint-Petersburg, 1991\), 349–98, at 363–71. Babić also argues that a sovereign's portrait had the same importance as a charter granted by him to the \*ktetor\* \(360\).](#)
  46. [See Klaus Wessel, “Konstantin u. Helena,” in \*Reallexikon zur byzantinischen Kunst\* \(Stuttgart: A. Hiersemann, 1990\), 4: cols. 365–66; Christopher Walter, \*The Iconography of Constantine the Great, Emperor and Saint\* \(Leiden: Alexandros, 2006\), 106–10.](#)
  47. [For a detailed discussion of this topic, see Prioteasa, \*Medieval Wall Paintings\*, 77–113.](#)
  48. [On the representation of the Legend of the Cross in medieval art, see especially Karl Adolf Wiegel, “Die Darstellung der Kreuzauffindung bis zu Piero della Francesca” \(PhD diss., University of Cologne, 1973\); Susanne Pflieger, \*Eine Legende und ihre Erzählformen: Studien zur Rezeption der Kreuzlegenden in der italienischen Monumentalmalerei des Tre- und Quattrocento\* \(Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1994\); Barbara Baert, \*A Heritage of Holy Wood: The Legend of the True Cross in Text and Image\* \(Leiden: Brill, 2004\).](#)
  49. [For a detailed analysis of the three iconographic topics—the military saints, the holy kings of Hungary, and St. Helena with the True Cross or the Exaltation/Finding of the Holy Cross—and their relationship to the donor portraits in the churches at Crișcior and Ribița, see Prioteasa, \*Medieval Wall Paintings\*, 54–113, 144. The line of argumentation and much of the bibliography were appropriated and partially developed by Năstăsoiu, “Between Personal Devotion and Political Propaganda,” 260–82.](#)

50. [It has been argued that in churches with no dome, the themes that would usually decorate it were accommodated in the highest zones of the sanctuary and nave. See Karin M. Skawran, \*The Development of Middle Byzantine Fresco Painting in Greece\* \(Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1982\), 54; Melita Emmanuel, "La peinture byzantine de l'île d'Eubée en Grèce au XIIIe et XIVE siècles," \*Corso di Cultura sull'arte ravennate e bizantina\* 38 \(1991\): 185–96, at 188.](#)
51. [See Günther Brucher, ed., \*Geschichte der bildenden Kunst in Österreich\*, vol. 2, \*Gotik\* \(Münich, London & New York: Prestel, 2000\), 406; France Stelé, "Slovenska gotska podružnica in njen ikonografski kanon" \[The Slovenian Gothic and its iconographic canon\], \*Zbornik Narodnog Muzeja\* 4 \(1964\): 315–28; Vasile Drăguț, "Iconografia picturilor murale gotice din Transilvania" \[The Iconography of Gothic mural paintings in Transylvania\], in \*Pagini de veche artă românească\*, \(Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 1972\), 2:9–83, at 13–17; Marosi, \*Magyarország művészet\*, 182.](#)
52. [André Grabar, \*La peinture religieuse en Bulgarie\* \(Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1928\), 223–24; André Xyngopoulos, "Une icône byzantine à Thessalonique," \*Cahiers archéologiques\* 3 \(1948\): 114–28, at 120–24, 127–28.](#)
53. [Klaus Wessel, "Apostelkommunion," \*Reallexikon zur byzantinischen Kunst\*, 1: cols. 239–45.](#)
54. [Vasile Drăguț, \*Pictura murală din Transilvania\* \[Mural painting in Transylvania\] \(Bucharest: Meridiane, 1970\), 21–22, 40.](#)
55. [Chara Konstantinidi, \*O Μελισμός: Οι συλλειτουργούντες ιεράρχες και οι άγγελοι-διάκονοι μπροστά στην αγία τράπεζα με τα τίμια δώρα ή τον ευχαριστιακό Χριστό\* \(Thessalonica: P. Kyriakidi A.E., 2008\), 125–58.](#)
56. [\*Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca\* lists only one bishop under this name, Callinicus \(Kallinikos\), patriarch of Constantinople \(d. 705\) \(\*BHG\*, 1: nos. 288–89; \*Novum auctarium BHG\*, nos. 287z, 288\), celebrated on 23, 24 or 30 August. In the \*Acta sanctorum\*, the same patriarch is the only holy bishop bearing this name \(\*AASS Augusti\*, 4:644–47; \*AASS Propylaeum ad Novembris\*, col. 917–20; \*AASS Octobris\*, 11:205, 206\).](#)
57. [On the icon's relationship to the liturgy, see especially Hans Belting, "An Image and Its Function in the Liturgy: The Man of Sorrows in](#)

- Byzantium,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 34/35 (1980–81): 1–16.
58. Michael Altripp, *Die Prothesis und ihre Bildausstattung in Byzanz unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Denkmäler Griechenlands* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1998), 89–91.
59. Konstantinidi, *Μελισμός*, 98, 213, fig. 247.
60. For representations of the Man of Sorrows in wall paintings and altarpieces in the Hungarian Kingdom, see Ivan Gerát, *Stredoveké obrazové témy na Slovensku: osoby a príbehy* [Medieval pictorial themes in Slovakia: Figures and stories] (Bratislava: Veda, 2001), 48–59; Marosi, *Magyarországi művészet*, 200–2.
61. For the text of Canon 82 of the Quinisext Council, see Cyril Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312–1453: Sources and Documents* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1986), 139–40.
62. The scene at Hălmaġiu was first analyzed by Ecaterina Cincheza-Buculei, “L’ensemble de peinture murale de Hălmaġiu (XV<sup>e</sup> siècle): Iconographie et fondateurs,” *Revue des Études Sud-Est Européennes* 22, no.1 (1984): 3–25, at 9–11. For a detailed discussion on both the paintings at Hălmaġiu and Ribîța, see Prioteasa, *Medieval Wall Paintings*, 114–25.
63. See, for example, the painting in the chapel of the Evangelical church in Sânpetru (Braşov County), ca. 1400.
64. For the resplendence of the ceremonies and the miracles related to the Latin cult of the Eucharist, which reportedly would have impressed and converted some Orthodox to Catholicism, see Gábor Tüskés and Éva Knapp, “A Szent Vér tisztelete Magyarországon” [The veneration of the Holy Blood in Hungary], in *Művelődéstörténeti tanulmányok a magyar középkorról* [Studies in the cultural history of the Hungarian Middle Ages], ed. Béla Köpeczi and Erik Fügedi (Budapest: Gondolat, 1986), 76–116, at 101–2, 107; Lidia Gross, *Confreriile medievale în Transilvania (secolele XIV–XVI)* [Medieval confraternities in Transylvania (from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century)], 2nd rev. ed. (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2009), 234.
65. The Franciscan vicar of Bosnia, Bartholomew of Alverna (1367–1407), accused the Serbs, Bulgarians, and Vlachs in the Hungarian

- kingdom of relationships with the “Paulicians” of Wallachia and the heretics of Bosnia (Papacostea, *Geneza*, 236).
66. Information coming from the same Franciscan vicar of Bosnia, Bartholomew of Alverna, writing about the “schismatic and heretic Serbs, Bulgars, and Romanians in the Hungarian Kingdom” (Papacostea, *Geneza*, 227–37).
  67. From the works of synthesis, see especially Virgil Vătășianu, *Istoria artei feudale în țările române* [The history of feudal art in the Romanian countries], vol. 1 (Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1959); Drăguț, *Pictura murală din Transilvania*; Marius Porumb, *Pictura românească din Transilvania*, vol. 1, Sec. XIV–XVII / *Die rumänische Malerei in Siebenbürgen I. (14.–17. Jahrhundert)* (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1981); Sorin Ulea, *Arhanghelul de la Ribîța* [The archangel of Ribîța] (Bucharest: Editura Cerna, 2001).
  68. On this subject, see the valuable chapter by Zsombor Jékely.

13

CHARLES IV AND BYZANTIUM  
Icon Painting and Stone Incrustation in  
Fourteenth Century Prague

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Here begins a new account of St. Wenceslas the Martyr, duke of the Bohemians, compiled by the lord Charles, emperor of the Romans, king of Bohemia.

As by God's mercy and favor the Christian religion grew and Svatopluk king of the Moravians was baptised by their archbishop St. Cyril; when his brother St. Methodius succeeded the latter in the archbishopric the illustrious Duke Bořivoj of Bohemia with his wife Ludmila the martyr was baptised by the blessed Methodius in the church of St. Vitus in Velegrad, the cathedral city of Moravia.<sup>1</sup>

As attested to in this fourteenth-century *Life of St. Wenceslas*, which was bound together with the autobiography of Emperor Charles IV (1316–78), Bohemian medieval history is intimately linked with the Great Moravian

Empire and with the two Byzantine missionaries, Cyril and Methodius, who created the first written language for the Slavs. These connections were forged in the second half of the ninth century under the rule of Rastislav (846–70), who wanted to gain political independence from Frankish rulers by creating a written language for his people. At first, he looked to the West for help, but after receiving no answer from the pope in Rome, he turned to Byzantium. In a letter to Emperor Michael III (r. 840–67) in Constantinople, Rastislav requested missionaries who would explain the word of God to the Slavs in their own language.<sup>2</sup> In response, two sons of a Byzantine dignitary from Thessaloniki were sent to Moravia in 863: Constantine and Methodius. Living in a monastery on Mount Olympus at the time, Constantine had been a librarian in Hagia Sophia. Methodius was a ruler of a region in the empire inhabited by Slavs. As a part of their mission in Moravia, they invented a new alphabet, known as Glagolitic, which was inspired by the Greek, Coptic, and Hebrew alphabets, and they translated various biblical texts into a language that is now known as Old Church Slavonic. Although Constantine (who adopted the name Cyril when he was tonsured) died shortly afterward in Rome, Methodius returned to Moravia and helped to reorganize the Church, separating it from Bavarian jurisdiction. In 880, Pope John VIII (d. 882) acknowledged Old Church Slavonic as the fourth liturgical language, gave Methodius jurisdiction over all Moravia's clergy and appointed him as the head of the Moravian church. Although the Frankish clergy took this power back after the death of Methodius in the late 880s, “Cyril and Methodius succeeded in turning the burgeoning Christian culture in Moravia toward Byzantium. The adoption of the Byzantine model of church architecture, frescoes, and objects of personal devotion (such as pectoral crosses) points to the enduring influence of Cyril and Methodius's mission.”<sup>3</sup>

In the fourteenth century, these ancient links with Byzantium were revived by Emperor Charles IV. At this time, however, it was believed that Glagolitic was created by St. Jerome—who originated from Dalmatia, one of the four historical territories of Croatia and a region whose history was deeply intertwined with Byzantium.<sup>4</sup> Croatia also appeared in an early fourteenth-century chronicle of Dalimil, the oldest such text written in Old Czech, which located the original homeland of the Czech people there.<sup>5</sup>

These connections are important because Charles's patronage of art and architecture was deeply rooted in the ideas that he had about his place in the history of time. His obsession with identity can be traced to his position bridging two important dynasties: his father was John of Luxembourg (1296–1346), son of Emperor Henry VII (1273–1313), and his mother was Elizabeth of Přemyslid (1292–1330), a Bohemian princess and the last in line of a dynasty that had ruled Bohemia for over four centuries. While his imperial heritage was illustrious, Charles resolved to familiarize himself with his Slavic roots when he returned to Bohemia after spending much of his childhood abroad. Upon his return to Prague, Charles wrote: “We had completely forgotten the Czech language, which we have since relearned, so that we speak it and understand it like any other Bohemian.”<sup>6</sup> This apprehension reveals Charles's anxiety about his Czech heritage, which was illuminated also by the inclusion of the early history of the Czechs into his autobiography.

Charles's desire to invoke the antiquity of his lineage and his understanding of what that antiquity looked like can also be felt in much of his patronage. In 1347, he founded a new Benedictine monastery in Prague, known as Emmaus, and dedicated it to celebrating the memory of SS Jerome, Cyril, Methodius, Adalbert, and Procopius.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, in this act of foundation, Charles stressed the connection between the Croats and the Czechs, stating that the monastery would allow for a proper veneration of Jerome “just as (if) among his own people and homeland.”<sup>8</sup> The aim of this foundation was to celebrate Mass in the Slavonic language, and for this purpose, Charles brought to Prague monks from Dalmatia since Old Church Slavonic was still in use there.<sup>9</sup>

Emmaus Monastery was not an isolated evocation of the spirit of Byzantium in Prague. It was also present in panel paintings of the period and in the architectural decoration of St. Vitus Cathedral—two case studies that this chapter explores. Contemporary sources reveal that at least some of these artworks were thought to have roots in Byzantium as they were described as made in *more greco* (in the Greek manner).<sup>10</sup> While it is impossible to comprehend in full the way that these works were interpreted by contemporaries and by the emperor, especially since many Byzantine models arrived in Prague indirectly through Italy, this chapter will show

evidence of the way that Charles IV was personally involved in bringing Italo-Byzantine artworks and artists to the city. His acquisition of icons in Rome and further afield affected Bohemian panel painting because these paintings quickly started to serve as models for Bohemian artists. Similarly, Charles IV, with his eclectic and well-traveled tastes, insisted that a Byzantinizing mosaic be added to the design of the south transept of Prague Cathedral, even though the portal there had already been consecrated.

### **Roman and Byzantine Icons in Bohemia**

In 1368, Charles IV spent two months in Rome as a guest of the pope. It seems likely that it was on this extended trip that he became familiar with the Italo-Byzantine cult icons of Mary that were housed in some of the most important churches in Rome.<sup>11</sup> There is good evidence to show that Charles brought some of these images, or copies of them, back to Bohemia.<sup>12</sup> He was captivated especially with icons known as *Acheiropoieta* (images not made by human hands). Of these, some were believed to have been painted from life by the Evangelist Luke, who was described in early texts as the person who made the first portraits of the “founders of the Christian faith and as the first Christian painter.”<sup>13</sup> Charles's fascination with portraiture probably fueled his connection to these images; he likely looked to these icons as images where he could find a true likeness of the Virgin, a portrait of the mother of God. Luke was probably first associated with this tradition in the ninth-century text by St. Andrew of Crete, written shortly before the Iconoclastic Controversy.<sup>14</sup>

In Rome, five cult icons believed to have been painted by Luke were housed in some of the city's most important churches, including the San Sisto icon in the convent of Monte Mario, the Madonna and Child icon in Santa Maria Nova, the Madonna ad Martyres icon in the Pantheon, the Madonna Salus Populi Romani icon in Santa Maria Maggiore, and the Madonna della Clemenza icon in Santa Maria in Trastevere. Although isolated from one another, the icons' strong links to the churches that housed them created a kind of spiritual topography of Rome, a topography that Charles IV almost certainly experienced firsthand.<sup>15</sup> Their cult status and miracle-working reputation were also highlighted by the numerous



copies that survived in Rome alone. The provenance history of some of those copies, however, was altered over the centuries, attributing them to St. Luke as well. One of these copies, the Madonna Aracoeli icon in Santa Maria Ara Coeli on the Capitoline Hill, was the most important copy of the San Sisto icon, and it in turn became a model for numerous Bohemian paintings. As the San Sisto icon, the Aracoeli image reproduced the Virgin as *Advocata*, appearing without the Christ Child. By the thirteenth century, when the church on the Capitoline Hill became Franciscan, the Aracoeli icon was no longer thought to be a copy of the San Sisto icon but rather an original portrait painted by St. Luke. The icon's popularity flourished, and by the fourteenth century, it became an embodiment of Rome itself after it was credited with saving the city from the plague.<sup>16</sup> In 1350, Cola di Rienzo mentioned the Aracoeli church in a letter to Arnošt of Pardubice, the archbishop of Prague. Charles IV no doubt knew about the Aracoeli church and its icon not only because he had a close relationship with the archbishop<sup>17</sup> but also because three versions of the Madonna Aracoeli survive in Prague, and they represent the earliest “copies” of the Roman icon outside of Italy: the Madonna Aracoeli in St. Vitus Cathedral (ca. 1368; [Figure 13.1](#)), the Madonna Aracoeli by a follower of Master Theodoric (ca. 1370), and the Madonna Aracoeli by the Master of the Třebon Altarpiece (ca. 1385–90).<sup>18</sup> While we do not know for certain why these paintings exist in Prague, it is believed that Charles must have brought a copy executed on paper from Rome and that this imported image served as a prototype. Stylistically, however, the three images differ from the Madonna Aracoeli in Rome in several important ways. The Madonna in all three Prague paintings wears a large broach on her chest but no diadem on her head, she leans her head to one side rather than being frontal, and she has drops of blood on her face and veil. It is obvious from these details that the artist who executed the image that was brought to Prague from Rome did not work directly in front of the Madonna Aracoeli, which was difficult to access, but that he used some type of rough sketch or another copy of the Roman icon as a model. The variations in the Prague panels also highlight the exponentiality of these icons, making it difficult to track down the way that they relate to each other and the way that they relate to older Roman or Byzantine prototypes.



*Figure 13.1* [Madonna Aracoeli, ca. 1360–70.](#)

Source: National Gallery, Prague inv. No. VO 10656.

One of the most interesting differences between the Roman icon and those in Prague is the blood on the Virgin's veil and face. This detail is thought to be a reference to the *peplum cruentatum*, the piece of cloth that the Virgin wore in the Crucifixion that was splattered with Christ's blood, a “super-relic,” in the words of Jeffrey Hamburger.<sup>19</sup> We know that Charles acquired several pieces of the *peplum cruentatum* from Rome and that one of the paintings may have housed a small fragment of the relic in the brooch worn by the Virgin. Hamburger's article on the *peplum cruentatum* explores the earliest images of the Crucifixion in which the Virgin is shown with drops of blood on her cloak. The oldest of these is a scene of the Crucifixion from the Missal of Henricus Thesaurus, dated to ca. 1330–40 and housed in the Library of the National Museum in Prague (MC XVI B 12, fol. 42v).<sup>20</sup> As he argues, “These images underscore the extent to which images were mobilised as propaganda to advertise and popularise the cult of certain relics.”<sup>21</sup> Olga Pujmanová argues that the drops of blood on the Aracoeli Madonnas in Prague might be a reference to pilgrim *devocionata* (devotional items), which often had drops of blood on them. She suggests that the paper adhered to the earliest of the three panels, the Madonna Aracoeli in St. Vitus, might be the pilgrim *devocionata* that Charles himself brought back to Prague from Rome.<sup>22</sup> In her view, this might explain why this particular painting is so small (compared to the others in Prague 29 x 22 cm) and also why it is rather different from the original in Rome. This small version of the Roman icon is remarkable because it is painted on paper, cut out, and applied to a wooden panel, which was then punched and gilded.<sup>23</sup> While it is clear that the decoration of the panel happened in Bohemia, the applied image on paper is believed to have been made in Italy. Accordingly, this painting could in part be the “the copy” that Charles acquired in Rome.

Another imported icon believed to have been painted by St. Luke was the Roudnice Madonna, which was kept in the Augustinian monastery in Roudnice. This icon may have been brought to Prague from Cyprus—possibly as a gift from the king of Cyprus, Peter I (1328–69), to Charles

IV.<sup>24</sup> Equally plausibly, the icon may have been acquired by Charles in Italy but created in Sinai or Acre, making its way to Italy as a Crusader or pilgrimage souvenir.<sup>25</sup> It was venerated as an image made by St. Luke and was believed to have miracle-working properties.<sup>26</sup> While the Roudnice Madonna no longer survives, we can get an idea of what it looked like by studying one of its copies, the so-called Madonna of Březnice ([Figure 13.2](#)). Located in the collection of the National Gallery in the convent of St. Agnes of Bohemia, the painting was kept in the chapel of Březnice Castle prior to World War II, from where it received its name. Its original location is not known, but it has an inscription on the reverse in Latin dating it to 1396 and stating: “This image of the glorious Virgin, commissioned by [Wenceslas] the most illustrious King of Bohemia, was painted to resemble the image in Roudnice, which St. Luke painted with his own hand. A.D. 1396.”<sup>27</sup> The stylistic differences between Bohemian paintings and this image, with its resemblance to Byzantine icons, specifically the icon of the Virgin Kykkotissa type from St. Catherine on Sinai ([Figure 13.3](#)), makes clear that the now-lost Roudnice image must have had an Eastern Mediterranean origin. The Madonna of Březnice's stylistic inclination, especially its linear drapery, which is defined by flatness, and its facial features, is also a testament to the fact that Bohemian artists were able to copy Byzantine images successfully.





[Figure 13.2](#) [Madonna of Březnice, 1396.](#)

Source: National Gallery, Prague inv. No. VO 1099.





[Figure 13.3 The Virgin Kykkotissa, ca. 1280, St. Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai.](#)

Source: University of Michigan | Michigan-Princeton-Alexandria Expeditions to Mount Sinai.

The famous Sinai icon of the Virgin and Child that the Madonna of Březnice and the Roudnice Madonna mirror is dated to ca. 1280 and is a part of a diptych, with St. Procopius on the other panel.<sup>28</sup> The Sinai image of the Virgin and Child is, in turn, a copy of the famous Virgin Kykkotissa, a miracle-working icon believed to have been painted by St. Luke from the Kykko Monastery in Cyprus and dated to the early twelfth century. One defining characteristic of the copies of the Kykko icon is the flat, patterned veil and the contorted pose of the Christ Child, which is modified in some copies. Whereas the Madonna of Březnice is a mirror image of the Sinai icon, it presents the Christ Child in a more comfortable pose than the original panel. The color of the Virgin's veil has also been altered from the traditional red to gold with red stars. The veil's flatness and angular folds at the lower hem are very close to the Sinai icon but the drapery of the Virgin's robe underneath has been misunderstood and no longer evokes real fabric. Still, we are dealing with a copy of a copy of a copy and so losing elements amid all those translations is inevitable.

What makes these Bohemian paintings *Byzantine*, above all else, is that they communicate an important characteristic of Byzantine art: its conservatism and its obsession with imitation over invention.<sup>29</sup> While painting, sculpture, and architecture in northern Europe changes dramatically with each generation, icons tend to exhibit a sense of constraint in order to convey “continuity through replication.”<sup>30</sup> As Gary Vikan notes, “The Byzantines believed that the power and sanctity of revered iconic archetypes resided collectively and individually in all copies, regardless of medium, style, aesthetic merit, or expense.”<sup>31</sup> The Byzantinizing panel paintings in Bohemia should therefore not be considered in isolation but rather as a part of a continuously copied group, which was directly related to the miracle-working icons that Charles IV encountered in Rome and further afield. Bringing copies of Byzantine or Italo-Byzantine icons to Prague (and having those images copied further) also meant that Charles's kingdom and, most importantly, his imperial city was able to model itself on Rome, which itself had a sacred topography established by churches that housed important miracle-working images.

## **Mosaics and Stone Incrustation**

Byzantine connections can also be found in Prague's architectural decoration. The most obvious link with Byzantium is Prague's south transept, where Charles commissioned a monumental mosaic to go above the portal of the new Gothic cathedral ([Figure 13.4](#)).<sup>32</sup> As Beneš Krabice of Weitmile reveals in the *Chronicle of the Church of Prague*, the emperor's trip to Italy inspired the large mosaic, which was also the first of its kind north of the Alps. At the center of the mosaic is an enthroned figure of Christ in a mandorla, supported on both sides by angels holding instruments of the Passion. A Vera icon, which refers to the copy that Charles brought to Prague from Italy, decorates a band just above the figure of Christ. The Virgin Mary and St. John the Baptist kneel in prayer on either side of Christ, who is further flanked by the twelve Apostles holding their attributes. Below this register on the left side, people are seen climbing out of sarcophagi as angels pull them up into Heaven. On the right side, a group of people bound by rope are being pulled into hell by demons. Just below Christ is a group of six figures, who represent the patron saints of Bohemia: SS Procopius, Sigismund, Vitus, Wenceslas, Ludmila, and Adalbert (from left to right). They are identified by their attributes but also by inscriptions on a band beneath them. In the spandrels above the central arch are two further kneeling figures, representing Charles IV and his wife, Elizabeth of Pomerania, wearing imperial crowns, their hands clasped in prayer.





[Figure 13.4 South transept of St. Vitus Cathedral, Prague.](#)

Source: Jana Gajdošová.

Archaeological and documentary evidence demonstrates that this part of the façade was changed two years after its completion to include the Last Judgment mosaic, although we do not know the name of the artist responsible for the work.<sup>33</sup> The crown chamber and the portal below were completed by 1368, when the archbishop had consecrated the portal.<sup>34</sup> In 1370, however, after Charles returned from his third trip to Italy, he decided to make a change to the façade. As Beneš recalls, “At that time, the emperor had a glass image made *in the Greek manner* and set in the façade above the porch of the Prague Cathedral, a splendid and very costly work” (emphasis added).<sup>35</sup>

After his three trips to Italy, Charles would have come to know other monumental examples of mosaics, such as those on the façades of San Frediano Cathedral in Lucca and of Santa Maria Maggiore, Santa Maria in

Trastevere, and Old St. Peter's in Rome.<sup>36</sup> The art of mosaic had a long legacy in Italy that reached back to an early Christian and Roman past; however, it did not have a continuous history.<sup>37</sup> By the tenth century, mosaics were no longer made in Italy, and their revival obviously entailed the contribution of craftspeople from Byzantium. In relation to the eleventh-century mosaics that once decorated the basilica of Monte Cassino, Herbert Bloch notes that while the architecture of the church was clearly Western, its decoration can be attributed to Byzantine artists.<sup>38</sup> Bloch quotes Leo of Ostia, who writes about the mosaics in Monte Cassino by noting,

the degree of perfection which was attained in these arts by the masters whom Desiderius had hired can be seen in their works: one would believe that the figures in the mosaics were alive ... And since *Magistra Latinitas* had left uncultivated the practice of these arts for more than five hundred years and, through the efforts of this man, with the inspiration and help of God, promised to regain it in our time, the abbot in his wisdom decided that a great number of young monks in the monastery should be thoroughly initiated in these arts in order that their knowledge might not be again be lost in Italy.<sup>39</sup>

By the thirteenth century, the creation of mosaics gained new momentum in Italy, especially as popes commissioned them as a sign of their authority and of the antiquity of their office. The new links that were forged with Byzantium in the thirteenth century, especially by Venetians and Pisans, were probably another important factor in this.<sup>40</sup> And it is these late medieval examples in Italy upon which Charles IV would have modeled his Prague mosaic.

So who may have been responsible for the work in Prague? Carlo Bertelli argues that the frequently acknowledged Venetian attribution should be reevaluated in favor of a workshop that consisted of both local craftspeople and central Italian artists, especially those with close knowledge of a very similar mosaic on the façade of Orvieto Cathedral.<sup>41</sup> Still it is interesting that Beneš Krabice acknowledged the foreign nature of Prague's mosaic in his chronicle by noting that it was made “in the Greek manner,” a phrase that was commonly used in the Middle Ages to classify works as belonging

to the Byzantine tradition.<sup>42</sup> As Anastasia Drandaki notes in relation to panel painting designated with this phrase, however, this view is usually a perception of Byzantine art “by a public that is looking at it as a foreign artistic product; [it] does not assume that [the work] came from Byzantium or that the artist who created it was Greek. It only assumes that the artist adopted those iconographical or stylistic features which sufficed to ascribe the work to that tradition in the eyes of the viewer.”<sup>43</sup>

Just beyond the porch of St. Vitus bearing the mosaic is Wenceslas Chapel, which also embraces a foreign character by employing decoration made of cut stones ([Figure 13.5](#)). In the words of Paul Crossley, “The dark, introverted space of the chapel, with its round-arched portal, its incrustated dado of semi-precious stones and its Muslim-looking vault, approached through a southern porch dominated by a large mosaic—these oddities intrude into the Gothic complexities of the cathedral like dissonant echoes from an Italian, Early Christian, Romanesque, even Islamic, world.”<sup>44</sup> The chapel stands upon the site of an earlier rotunda that St. Wenceslas had built to house the relics of St. Vitus and that he chose as his own final resting place; the foundations of that original building are still preserved underneath the chapel. The Wenceslas Chapel is built as a square space with a tall, elaborate vault and a dado arcade decorated with large slabs of semi-precious stones with punched gilding between them.<sup>45</sup> The jasper, amethyst, carnelian, chrysoprase, and chalcedony stone slabs measure up to sixty centimeters in height, while being only seven to fourteen millimeters in depth.<sup>46</sup> Between these slabs are painted figures that depict Christ's Passion. The ornament here is a type of opus sectile; the stone encrustations either participate in the narrative scenes, for example constituting the column of Christ's Flagellation, or they are shaped to construct large crosses.





*Figure 13.5* [St. Wenceslas Chapel in St. Vitus Cathedral, Prague.](#)

Source: Jana Gajdošová.

The decoration of the dado arcade is related to the mosaic on the outside because it too was ordered by the emperor as an afterthought in 1372, the year when the mosaic would have just been completed.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, the second layer of plaster used to set the polished precious stones into the dado arcade of the Wenceslas Chapel is composed of the same materials as the second layer of plaster used on the mosaic, suggesting that at least some of the same artisans worked on both projects.<sup>48</sup> As noted by Barbara Drake Boehm, however, the contemporary documents about the craftspeople reveal that the *pulierer imperatoris* (imperial polisher) or *pollitor lepidum* (polisher of stones), as they are called, were local.<sup>49</sup> Still, the origin of all the artisans who worked on the ornament in the chapel remains a question. The sectile technique can be related to that found in Byzantium and Italy. For example, Charles IV may have been familiar with descriptions of the *crux gemmata* that Constantine set up on a wall of his palace in Constantinople, and he would have been familiar with the abundance of Cosmatesque work on floors, walls, and liturgical furnishings in Rome.<sup>50</sup> The technique on the dado arcade in the Wenceslas Chapel, however, is rather different than the work of the Cosmatti as it uses irregular shapes of polished slabs of precious stones, not marble. Still, it would be easy to imagine that the aesthetic in the chapel is a result of local craftspeople interpreting and assimilating descriptions of foreign techniques.<sup>51</sup>

## Conclusion

The associations between Byzantium and Prague are curiously highlighted in *The Travels of John Mandeville* (London, British Library, MS Add. 24189), a book that traces its provenance to Bohemia. Here, the concept that Byzantine art impacted some aspects of art in Prague is turned on its head when a city that looks like Prague is actually deployed to represent Constantinople. On folio 9v, the story of the imperial relics is staged in Constantinople but the view of the city is dominated by a Germanic square. A statue of Emperor Justinian stands within the walls of the city; however, his orb has dropped to the floor in “an eloquent metaphor for the loss of power of Byzantine rulers.”<sup>52</sup> On folio 11r, an emperor, shown sitting in a

square, is presented with the Passion relics. He wears a long beard and the crown of the king of the Romans (much like the crown created for the reliquary bust of Charlemagne and often shown in paintings worn by Charles IV). Zoe Opacic sees the public square in this folio to be the Charles Square in Prague, with the Corpus Christi Chapel in the middle, and “the bearded figure of the emperor wearing a distinctive German imperial crown is none other than Charles IV, the ‘alter Constantinus’ of the archbishop's eulogy and the tireless collector of Passion relics.”<sup>53</sup> The way that Prague is projected onto Constantinople is a telling sign that at the end of Charles IV's life, the idea that Prague was the new Rome and the new Constantinople was accepted into a collective consciousness.

The artworks explored in this chapter illustrate that Byzantine models arrived in Bohemia indirectly and were used to demonstrate a heritage with an ancient past—a past that could be manipulated to fit a new narrative. Icon painting and the art of mosaic and stone incrustation all speak a language that recalls Byzantium, made *more greco*, as described in the chronicle of Beneš Krabice of Weitmile. Still, while some contemporary audiences may have understood the works' sources to come from the East or South, their Byzantine or Italian heritage was molded to fit a new age of creativity in Bohemia. Some artworks were commissioned to follow a prototype to demonstrate a strong connection to a specific place and time; others were changed more dramatically in order to conform to a new style in Bohemia. As such, artists interpreted these techniques and iconographies more loosely and combined them with artistic influences from elsewhere, especially as Prague was quickly becoming a place where artists from all corners of Europe converged. Moreover, when we look at the patronage of someone like Charles IV, we must also acknowledge the difference “between appropriation and influence, between a patron's borrowing something because he or she wishes to be identified as Byzantine or borrowing something Byzantine and translating and using it in his or her own terms.”<sup>54</sup> Assuming a one-way system of transfer of ideas when exploring the links between Byzantium and Northern Europe is therefore not only highly inaccurate, but it also simplifies an artistic world that was extremely complex and a patron who was consistently manipulating the past for his own benefit.

It is impossible to know exactly why Byzantine art and its derivatives resonated so strongly with Charles IV and how they were understood by his contemporaries. While this chapter suggests an answer by exploring the ways that these artforms may have been used to manipulate the emperor's heritage and legacy, there is more work to do. A possible avenue for further study would be an investigation of the preceding centuries in order to see how well the links that Bohemia forged with Byzantium in the ninth century survived into the fourteenth century in order to understand whether Charles's Byzantinizing tendencies were a revival or a continuum.

## Notes

1. [Charles IV, \*Autobiography of Emperor Charles IV and His Legend of St. Wenceslas\*, eds. Balász Nagy and Frank Schaer \(Budapest: Central European University Press, 2001\), 185.](#)
2. [This allegiance with the Byzantine Empire was not only religious but also political, countering the allegiance between Louis the German and Prince Boris of Bulgaria. See Oscar Prieto-Domínguez, "Mission of Cyril and Methodius to Moravia \(9th Century\)," in \*Great Events in Religion: An Encyclopedia of Pivotal Events in Religious History 600–1450\*, eds. Florin Curta and Andrew Holt \(Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2017\), 2:424.](#)
3. [Prieto-Domínguez, "Mission of Cyril and Methodius," 425.](#)
4. [Julia Verkholantsev, "St. Jerome as a Slavic Apostle in Luxemburg Bohemia," \*Viator\* 44, no. 1 \(2013\): 251–86.](#)
5. [Josef Emler, "Dalimili Bohemiae Chronicon," in \*Fontes Rerum Bohemicarum\* \(Prague, 1882\), 3:6.](#)
6. [Charles IV, \*Autobiography\*, 67–69.](#)
7. [In contemporary sources, the monastery is referred to as the Slavonic Monastery of St. Jerome of the Order of St. Benedict in the New Town of Prague. Verkholantsev, "St. Jerome as a Slavic Apostle," 260.](#)
8. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, 257–58.](#)
9. [Zoë Opačić, "Emauzský klášter a Nové Město pražské: slovanská tradice, císařská ideologie a veřejný ritual v Praze 14. Století" \[\*Emmaus Monastery and the New Town: Slavonic Tradition, Imperial\*](#)

- [Ideology and Public Ritual in Fourteenth-Century Prague](#)], in [Emauzy: Benediktinský klášter Na Slovanech v srdci Prahy](#), eds. Klára Benešová and Kateřina Kubínová (Prague: Academia, 2008), 32–60; Zoë Opačić, “The Sacred Topography of Medieval Prague,” in [Sacred Sites and Holy Places: Exploring the Sacralization of Landscape through Space and Time](#), ed. Saebjörg Walaker Nordeide (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 266–77.
10. [Zuzana Frantová and Kristýna Pecinová, “The Icon of Old Brno: A Reconsideration,” \*Opuscula Historiae Artium\* 63 \(2013\): 62–75.](#)
  11. [Kateřina Kubínová, \*Imitatio Romae: Karel IV. a Řím\* \(Prague: Artefactum, 2006\), 105–37.](#)
  12. [When he returned from his second trip to Rome in 1355, for example, Charles brought a copy of the Vera icon to Prague, and when he returned from his third trip in 1368, he may have brought others, such as a copy of the Madonna Aracoeli. There is also a surviving icon in Brno, which is thought to originate in Byzantium, though a recent publication also suggests Puglia as a place of origin. See Frantová and Pecinová, “Icon of Old Brno,” 14.](#)
  13. [Michele Bacci, “With the Paintbrush of the Evangelist Luke,” in \*Mother of God: Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art\*, ed. Maria Vassilaki \(Milan: Skira, 2000\), 79.](#)
  14. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, 80.](#)
  15. [For more on the way that icons were placed in the city, see Gerhard Wolf, “Icons and Sites: Cult Images of the Virgin in Medieval Rome,” in \*Images of the Mother of God\*, ed. Maria Vassilaki \(New York: Routledge, 2005\), 40–41.](#)
  16. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, 41.](#)
  17. [Ivo Kořán, “Gotické veraikony a svatolukášské Madony v pražské katedrále” \[Gothic Veraicons and St. Luke's Madonnas in Prague Cathedral\], in \*Ivo Kořán. Texty\*, eds. Klára Benešová, Helena Dáňová, and David Vrána \(Prague: Artefactum, 2019\), 181.](#)
  18. [Kořán, “Gotické veraikony,” 165–208; Olga Pujmanová, “Madona Aracoeli a Veraikon v Praze” \[Madonna Aracoeli and the Veraicon in Prague\], \*Umění\* 40 \(1992\): 249–65; Milena Bartlová, “Icon-like Images in Bohemian Medieval Art,” \*IKONOTHEKA\* 22 \(2009\): 13–30.](#)



19. [Jeffrey F. Hamburger, “Bloody Mary: Traces of the Peplum Cruentatum in Prague—and in Strasbourg?” in \*Image, Memory, and Devotion: Liber Amicorum Paul Crossley\*, eds. Zoë Opačić and Achim Timmermann \(Turnhout: Brepols, 2011\), 1.](#)
20. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, fig. 8.](#)
21. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, 15.](#)
22. [Pujmanová, “Madona Aracoeli,” 256–57.](#)
23. [Figures painted by Tomaso da Modena were also attached to a patterned Bohemian gold ground in the Holy Cross Chapel at Karlštejn Castle. See Barbara Drake Boehm and Jiří Fajt, eds., \*Prague: The Crown of Bohemia, 1347–1437\* \(New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2005\), 158.](#)
24. [Barbara Drake Boehm, “Venice and the Byzantine Sphere,” in \*Byzantium: Faith and Power, 1261–1557\*, ed. Helen C. Evans \(New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2004\), 499.](#)
25. [Its resemblance specifically to the Sinai Virgin Kykkotissa \(discussed later\) supports this theory.](#)
26. [Milena Bartlová, “Tři texty Madony březnické” \[Three Madonna of Březnice Texts\], in \*Žena ve člunu. Sborník Hany J. Hlaváčkové\*, eds. Kateřina Horníčková and Michal Šroněk \(Prague: Artefactum, 2007\), 199.](#)
27. [Boehm and Fajt, \*Prague\*, 216.](#)
28. [Frantová and Pecinová, “Icon of Old Brno,” 65; Bartlová, “Icon-like Images,” 17–20. For more on the Sinai icon, see Kurt Weitzmann, “Icon Painting in the Crusader Kingdom,” \*Dumbarton Oaks Papers\* 20 \(1966\): 65–69; Mary Aspra-Vardavakis, “Diptych: A. St Prokopios, B. The Virgin Kykkotissa, and Saints,” in \*Mother of God: Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art\*, eds. Maria Vasilakē and Mouseio Benake \(Milan: Skira, 2000\), 444–46.](#)
29. [Gary Vikan, “Ruminations on Edible Icons: Originals and Copies in the Art of Byzantium,” \*Studies in the History of Art\* 20 \(1989\): 47–59.](#)
30. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, 57.](#)
31. [Note: \*Ibid.\*](#)
32. [Milena Nečásková and Francesca Piqué, “Documentation of the Last Judgment Mosaic,” in \*Conservation of the Last Judgment Mosaic, St.\*](#)

- Vitus Cathedral, Prague*, eds. Francesca Piqué and Dusan C. Stulik (Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute, 2004), 198.
33. Marie Kostlíková, “The Last Judgment Mosaic: The Historical Record, 1370–1910,” in Piqué and Stulik, *Conservation of the Last Judgment Mosaic*, 8n2.
  34. Josef Emler, *Fontes Rerum Bohemicarum* (Prague, 1884), 4:459–64.
  35. “Eodem etiam tempore fecit ipse Pragensis de opere vitreo more greco, de opere pulchro et multum sumtuoso.” Translation from Zuzana Všetečková, “The Iconography of the Last Judgment Mosaic and Its Medieval Context,” in Piqué and Stulik, *Conservation of the Last Judgment Mosaic*, 21.
  36. The mosaic has further links with other royal centers that Charles would have known, such as, from the time of Charlemagne, the mosaics in the Palatine Chapel in Aachen or in the oratory of Theodulf of Orleans in Germigny-des-Prés, or the mosaic that once decorated the portal at the abbey church of St-Denis.
  37. Carlo Bertelli, “The Last Judgment Mosaic: Bohemian Originality and the Italian Example,” in *Conservation of the Last Judgment Mosaic*, eds. Piqué and Stulik, 33.
  38. Herbert Bloch, “Monte Cassino, Byzantium and the West in the Earlier Middle Ages,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 3 (1946): 195.
  39. Note: *Ibid.*, 198.
  40. Jaroslav Folda, *Crusader Art: The Art of the Crusaders in the Holy Land, 1099–1291* (London: Lund Humphries, 2008).
  41. Bertelli, “Last Judgment Mosaic,” 33–36.
  42. Anastasia Drandaki, “A Maniera Greca: Content, Context, and Transformation of a Term,” *Studies in Iconography* 35 (2014): 39–44.
  43. Note: *Ibid.*, 41.
  44. Paul Crossley, “Bohemia Sacra: Liturgy and History in Prague Cathedral,” in *Pierre, lumière, couleur: Études d'histoire de l'art du Moyen Âge et l'honneur d'Anne Prache*, eds. Fabienne Joubert and Dany Sandron (Paris: Sorbonne Université, 1999), 341.
  45. Anton Legner, “Wände aus Edelstein und Gefäße aus Kristall,” in *Parler und der Schöne Stil, 1350–1400* (Cologne: Anton Legner, 1978), 3:169–82; Hana Šedinová, *Drahokamy Svatováclavské kaple [Precious Stones of the Wenceslas Chapel]* (Prague: Rezek, 2005).

46. [Barbara Drake Boehm, “Called to Create: Luxury Artists at Work in Prague,” in \*Prague\*, eds. Boehm and Fajt, 80.](#)
47. [“\*Deinde dominus imperator reversus Pragam fecit decorare capellam sancti Wenceslai in ecclesia Pragensi cum picturis, auro, gemmis et lapidibus preciosis ad honorem Dei et sancti Wenceslai martiris, sui protectoris et adiutoris.\*” Emler, \*Fontes Rerum Bohemicarum\*, 4:546.](#)
48. [Kostlíková, “Last Judgment Mosaic,” 4.](#)
49. [Boehm, “Called to Create,” 80.](#)
50. [Although no longer surviving, the crux gemmate is described in Šedinová, \*Drahokamy Svatováclavské kaple\*, 55. In Rome, any earlier sectilia work that preceded the work of the Cosmati does not survive, and so scholars tend to look to Byzantine examples, such as the eleventh-century church of the Nea Moni on the Greek island of Chios. See Paloma Pajares-Ayuela, \*Cosmatesque Ornament: Flat Polychrome Geometric Patterns in Architecture\*, trans. Maria Fleming Alvarez \(London: W. W. Norton, 2001\), 129. The historiography surrounding the work on the incrustation in Prague and Karlštejn is reviewed in Eliška Judová, “Karel IV. a severní Itálie. Původ výzdoby inkrustacemi v karlštejnských kaplích a kapli sv. Václava na Pražském hradu” \[Charles IV and Southern Italy. Origins of the Incrustation Decoration in Karlštejn and the Wenceslas Chapel on Prague Castle\] \(MA thesis, Masaryk University, 2013\), 3–11.](#)
51. [Karl Mösender, “Lapides Vivi: Über die Kreuzkapelle der Burg Karlstein,” \*Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte\* 34 \(1981\): 47–71.](#)
52. [Zoë Opačić, “Architecture and Religious Experience in 14th Century Prague,” in \*Kunst als Herrschaftsinstrument: Böhmen und das Heilige Römische Reich unter den Luxemburgern im europäischen Kontext\*, eds. Jiří Fajt and Andrea Langer \(Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2009\), 22.](#)
53. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, 23.](#)
54. [Liz James, \*Mosaics in the Late Medieval World: From Late Antiquity to the Fifteenth Century\* \(Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017\), 1–18.](#)

## **PART III**

# Ideals and Ideologies in Images and Texts

# 14

## THE BOWING PRINCE Post-Byzantine Representations of Christian Rulership in Moldavian Wall Paintings

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The divine origin of power is a central theme in the iconographic programs of several churches associated with the patronage of Voivode Stephen III of Moldavia (r. 1457–1504). This chapter examines the visual strategies of legitimizing monarchic authority employed in the post-Byzantine wall paintings of some of the most important late fifteenth-century religious foundations in the East Carpathian Principality (*Voivodat*), located in present-day Romania. I intend to offer a new interpretation of a distinctive element of Moldavian frescoes commissioned throughout the final decades of Stephen III's reign, namely the juxtaposition of princely portraits with the depiction of Christ as the “King of kings” and “Great High Priest.” In the visual and literary culture of Byzantine Christianity, the royal image of the Savior constituted a foundational element of the ideal representation of

rulership.<sup>1</sup> Based on a set of ideas that went back to the Old Testament definition of monarchy, kingship was understood as a divine emanation, a supernatural quality delegated by Christ, the celestial basileus, to his earthly lieutenants.<sup>2</sup>

## **Images Legitimizing Power: Visual Evidence from Moldavia**

Transmitted through the mediation of southern Slavic cultures, the Byzantine doctrine of Christ as the source of royal legitimacy had significant impact on the mural programs in late fifteenth-century Moldavia. For example, a series of iconographic analogies from the frescoes at the monastic church of the Prophet Elijah, erected by Stephen III in 1488, near his capital city, Suceava, attests to the local adoption of this ideal notion of Christian monarchy. The donor portraits of the voivode, his third wife, Maria Voichița (1457–1511), and his children are located on the western wall of the triconch nave, as pendant to a pictorial theme conventionally known as the “Royal Deësis” or the “Heavenly Court” ([Figure 14.1](#)).<sup>3</sup> This scene adapts an earlier Balkan prototype, articulated in mid-fourteenth-century Macedonia, around the region of Ohrid, and later disseminated across Eastern Europe.<sup>4</sup> Visualizing a typological exegesis of Psalm 44(45): 10(9) (“The Queen stood at your right in gold-woven clothing, decked out in many colors”), the image depicts Christ as “King of kings” and High Priest, flanked by the supplicant figures of the Mother of God in imperial garments and St. John the Forerunner.<sup>5</sup> On the opposite side of the western bay, a votive composition illustrates another intercessional schema correlated by scholars with earlier examples from the thirteenth-century Serbian Kingdom or the fifteenth-century Polish and Ruthenian lands.<sup>6</sup> Led by the church's patron saint, in this case, the Prophet Elijah the Tishbite, Stephen presents a miniature model of his foundation to the enthroned figure of Christ, who offers his blessing in exchange, both as a token of salvation and a gesture of divine legitimation.<sup>7</sup> The visual connection of the princely portrait with the “Royal Deësis” is emphasized through the introduction of several intermediate representations of monarchic archetypes, such as King David and the Holy Emperors Constantine and Helena, positioned in the lower tier of the nave.<sup>8</sup> This


iconographic syntax was likely informed by a rhetoric of political legitimation, centered on the divine lineage of monarchic power descending from the “Lord of lords” to the earthly ruler, through a series of models of holy kingship.

 A mural painting shows Stephen III offering his foundation to Christ in the presence of Elijah, Saint Peter, Constantine, and Helena, King David.

[Figure 14.1](#) [Stephen III offering his foundation to Christ through the mediation of the Prophet Elijah; SS Peter, Constantine and Helena \(flanking the True Cross\); King David, and the “Royal Deësis,” mural painting, after 1488, St. Elijah \(Sfântul Ilie\) Church, near Suceava, Romania.](#)

Source: Andrei Dumitrescu.


The spatial parallelism between the typological depiction of Psalm 44(45) and the votive composition was reiterated in the now-destroyed church of St. Prokopios in Bădeuți-Milișăuți (after 1487) and in the *katholikon* of Voroneț Monastery (ca. 1496) ([Figures 14.2](#) and [14.3](#)).<sup>9</sup> Notwithstanding the absence of an analogous sequence of royal characters as in the nave at St. Elijah, the selection of iconic figures at Voroneț reflects the same affinity for the depiction of sacred rulership by representing the Martyr John, the Persians’ emperor, in the northern apse.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the iconographers of the *katholikon* amplified the three-figure nucleus of the “Royal Deësis” by adding the Archangels Michael and Gabriel dressed in imperial robes.

 The Painting of a male figure enthroned surrounded by four figures

[Figure 14.2](#) [The “Royal Deësis” with the Archangels Michael and Gabriel, mural painting, ca. 1496, St. George Church, Voroneț](#)

## Monastery, Romania.

*Source:* Petru Palamar.

 A mural painting shows Stephen III and his family offering their foundation to Christ through the mediation of St. George.


*Figure 14.3* [Stephen III and his family offering his foundation to Christ through the mediation of St. George, mural painting, ca. 1496, St. George church, Voroneț Monastery, Romania.](#)

*Source:* Petru Palamar.

The correspondence between Stephen III's effigy and the representation of the “King of kings” is also encountered in the completely different architectural setting of the three-aisled naos of the former episcopal monastery in Rădăuți. The church of St. Nicholas was built in the late fourteenth century as a dynastic necropolis of Moldavian voivodes and decorated with frescoes between the years 1480 and 1500.<sup>11</sup> In this peculiar spatial configuration, the two images mirror each other as they are placed on opposite walls of the southern aisle, next to the tombstones of Stephen III's noble ancestors ([Figures 14.4](#) and [14.5](#)). The murals at Rădăuți were part of an extensive legitimation campaign built on the exaltation of Stephen's illustrious (real or fictitious) genealogy.<sup>12</sup> On the southwestern wall, there is an intriguing procession of founders guided by St. Nicholas before Christ's throne.<sup>13</sup> This composition places the voivode and one of his sons, Alexander (d. 1496) or Bogdan-Vlad (r. 1504–17), alongside Alexander the Elder (r. 1400–32), the most glorified figure of the Moldavian ruling family and the main benefactor of the monastery during the early fifteenth century. The emphasis on the representation of the monarchic institution was strengthened by the depiction of the saintly prince Joasaph and his mentor, the hermit Barlaam, on the lateral wall between the votive composition and the “Royal Deësis.” The crowned figure of Joasaph not only embodied a model of Christian rulership but also




pointed to the fundamental partnership between pious princes and monks, who were perceived as their ideal advisors and spiritual guides.<sup>14</sup>

 The Painting of a male figure enthroned surrounded by four figures

*Figure 14.4* [The “Royal Deësis” with SS Nicholas and John Chrysostom, mural painting, ca. 1480–1500, St. Nicholas Church, Bogdana Monastery, Rădăuți, Romania.](#)

*Source:* Andrei Dumitrescu.

 A mural painting shows the procession of ktetors. Voivode Alexander, the elder, hands over a building model to Christ in the presence of St. Nicholas.

*Figure 14.5* [The procession of ktetors comprising Voivode Alexander the elder, an unidentified child, Stephen III, one of his sons, Maria Voichița, and a daughter, guided by St. Nicholas before Christ, mural painting, ca. 1480–1500, St. Nicholas Church, Bogdana Monastery, Rădăuți, Romania.](#)

*Source:* Andrei Dumitrescu.

The recurring analogy between the “Royal Deësis” and portraits of Stephen III was noticed for the first time by Sorin Ulea, who integrated it into his broader interpretation of the political message supposedly conveyed by late fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Moldavian wall paintings. Asserting that the theological and liturgical significance of medieval iconography is only a secondary aspect, Ulea argues that the representation of the Queen standing at the right hand of Christ should be regarded as a “means of influencing masses,” a propagandistic instrument meant to promote the model of a “theocratic monarchy.”<sup>15</sup> Based on similar presuppositions, Dumitru Năstase states that the intercessory stance of the Virgin as queen reflects her role as “protectress of the Christians” in their fight against

Islam. Năstase links the imperial attributes of the figures in the Deësis as well as the association with Constantine the Great to a hypothetical project of reconquering the Byzantine capital, supported by Stephen III.<sup>16</sup> More recent studies have reconsidered the Christological, liturgical, and eschatological significance of the “Royal Deësis.” However, none of them have returned to the analysis of the symbolic correspondence with the princely portraits.<sup>17</sup> Regardless of the shortcomings of older readings, this visual analogy undeniably remains one of the most salient features of late fifteenth-century Moldavian programs, which requires further investigation.

The present chapter aims to reassess this pictorial association as a means of constructing an ideal model of Christian rulership focused on the monarch's privileged relationship with the celestial sovereign. The broader purpose of my analysis is to show that political and theological meanings should not be separated so drastically in the interpretation of Moldavian iconographic programs. Rather, they should be understood as elements of a coherent symbolic message shaped through the dynamic collaboration between mural images, inscriptions, and textual material—such as prayers and hagiographies—that circulated among local elites. The first part of this study examines the role of earlier southeastern European models in fashioning the local depiction of the divine fundamentals of monarchic authority. I argue that Moldavian iconographers replaced the traditional Byzantine and Balkan representation of the ruler as the “image of Christ” with an explicit visualization of the prince's status as a servant of the heavenly king. On this basis, the second section considers the correlation of this particular way of picturing monarchy as a sacred institution with the selection of iconic figures that mediate between the princely effigies and the “Royal Deësis.”

## **The Heavenly King and the Earthly Princes: Reshaping Balkan Models**

The association of royal portraits with the figure of Christ as “King of kings” was not a common strategy in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Balkan iconography. There are only two such occurrences of the “Royal Deësis” in Eastern European painting, both of them located in Macedonian

foundations of Serbian kings. The earliest known version of this configuration is attested in the narthex of the *katholikon* at Treskavec Monastery, now in the territory of North Macedonia. Commissioned by Stefan Dušan (r. 1331–46 as king; r. 1346–55 as emperor of the Serbs, Greeks, and Albanians) throughout the 1330s, the decoration of the northern cupola displays a monumental representation of Christ in imperial attire, surrounded by a procession of angelic choirs led by the Theotokos as Queen and by the Prophet David.<sup>18</sup> The depiction of the “Heavenly Court” surmounts a severely damaged portrait of the *ktetor* in the lower tier of the eastern wall.<sup>19</sup>

Almost four decades later, this iconographic correspondence was further developed in the church of St. Demetrios at Marko's Monastery (Markov Manastir) near Skopje (ca. 1376–77).<sup>20</sup> On the northern wall of the nave, the crowned Virgin, followed by King David, guides a group of martyrs dressed as courtiers before the throne of the divine basileus. This succession of standing figures ends in the western corner of the chamber, with the votive depictions of King Marko Mrnjavčević (r. 1371–95), his father, Vukašin (r. 1365–71), and Queen Jelena facing the joined representation of Emperor Constantine the Great and his saintly mother. Resembling King David, Emperor Constantine, and Christ himself, the two Serbian monarchs wear purple robes, *loroi* (imperial shawls), diadems, and even nimbi. These visual analogies alluded to the ideal of monarchy as a sacred office, entailing a mimetic relationship between the earthly sovereign and the “King of kings.”<sup>21</sup> By emulating the celestial archetypes of power, Kings Vukašin and Marko were identified both as living “images” or “copies” of Christ and as heirs of two exemplary monarchs—David and Constantine the Great.<sup>22</sup>

Compared to their Balkan forerunners, the iconographic programs at St. Elijah, Voroneț, and Rădăuți testify to a distinct reception of Byzantine imperial traditions. Unlike the frescoes at Marko's Monastery, the parallelism between the enthroned figure of Christ and the representations of the Moldavian voivode can no longer be characterized in terms of symbolic imitation. In Stephen III's foundations, the royal status of the Savior appears only as one aspect of his universal authority. Wearing not only a Byzantine crown with *prependulia* (hanging attachments) but also

patriarchal vestments, Christ reunites the attributes of eternal kingship and priesthood. Thus, the Son of God is presented as a model of rulership that is beyond imitation for any human monarch whose legitimate power was by definition limited to the temporal sphere. In front of his unapproachable majesty, the earthly prince is reduced to a position of hierarchic subordination.

This change in the ruler's status was also reflected in the compositional structure of Moldavian votive images. In Byzantine imperial imagery, as well as in its Bulgarian and Serbian adaptations, official portraiture assumed the frontal rendition meant to express the sacred, almost supernatural aura of the basileus who was pictured as the “likeness of God” (ὁμοίωσις Θεοῦ).<sup>23</sup> Apart from the crown and the generic splendor of the ceremonial vestments, the three fifteenth-century portraits of Stephen III showcase none of the defining elements of the Christomimetic hieraticism illustrated in earlier royal effigies. On the contrary, the designers of the eastern Carpathian iconographic programs seem more concerned with depicting the homage that human princes ought to pay to the heavenly king, recognizing him as the origin of their authority. This hypothetical intention might explain the iconographic choice of accentuating the submissive aspect of the donation act through a representational schema that assigns the most prominent place in the composition to Christ.

In contrast to the sumptuous robes of the voivode and the rendering of the adjacent Deësis scenes, the representations of the Savior included in the votive images on the western walls of Moldavian naves do not wear any insignia of power. However, although Christ appears only in his customary *all'antica* vests, his status as “King of the universe” is still suggested by the fact that he is seated on a throne with purple pillows and rests his feet on a marble footstool. Such oblique references to Christ's royal dignity were a common practice in the visual culture of Byzantium. In fact, explicit monarchic attributes, such as the crown, the *loros*, and the scepter, were introduced only in later contexts in the Balkan milieu. Therefore, the main peculiarity of fifteenth-century Moldavian programs consists of joining the two seemingly opposing modes of visualizing divine royalty through the systematic juxtaposition of the “Royal Deësis” with the votive panels.

The visual antithesis between the two ways of depicting Christ could have been modeled by a rather common idea of the Byzantine discourse on monarchic authority. Eastern theologians insisted on the mystical character of the Savior's royalty, a locus classicus evoked by the frescoes at Voronež where the “King of kings” holds an open codex that reads: “prystol 0 moi nMy(s) W mira sxgo priidete i videte 0 c+rqsto moe” (My throne is not from this world. Come and see my Kingdom).<sup>24</sup> The first part of the Slavonic inscription contains a slightly adjusted variant of a phrase taken from Jesus's dialogue with Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea (John 18:36). This passage was often quoted by Greek authors when they referred to the transcendent nature of Christ's rulership, opposing it to the worldly power embodied by the Roman authorities. Elaborating on the original recension of this biblical excerpt, a popular sermon on the Nativity of the Virgin by St. Andrew of Crete (d. 740) states:

Whereas as King and Ruler of peace, who is also leader in Israel, he [Christ] is shown not to have sat visibly on the throne of David, his father, but in accordance with what is apprehended by the intellect, he ruled eternally over the house of Jacob and never reached the end of kingship ... . For they do not treat him as a successor of David's kingship, nor do they recount that he was seated on David's throne, nor is he even raised to a power of rule equal to Herod or Pontius Pilate. Instead, one might attempt to understand these things in the most mystical sense of allegory, as in [the passage], *My kingdom is not of this world* [emphasis added].<sup>25</sup>

*The Third Antirrhetikos* of the iconodule patriarch Nikephoros of Constantinople (in office 806–15) follows a similar interpretative thread. Nikephoros writes that the eternal basileus did not need purple robes and a crown nor any other “corruptible symbols” that exalted the vanity of mundane kings.<sup>26</sup> According to the patriarch, Christ told Pilate that his kingdom was not from this world, implying that when he descended among humans, he chose to take on a humble appearance, concealing his divine power. Nevertheless, the incarnate Logos never ceased to shine in the glory of God the Father, as “King of all” (Παμβασιλεύς).<sup>27</sup> It is likely that

Moldavian literati, who might have played an important role in the articulation of the mural program of Stephen III's foundations, were familiar with this exegesis. Slavonic translations of SS Andrew and Nikephoros were often included in miscellanea (*sborniki*) copied in the monastic scriptoria of Moldavia and Wallachia.<sup>28</sup> Interpreted through the lens of these Christological ideas, the “Royal Deësis” in the *katholikon* at Voroneț could have been perceived as an iconic revelation of the Savior's authority and eternal dominion. Through the double imperative “Come and see,” the text insert in the codex invites the beholder to contemplate Christ's majesty that was only allusively rendered in the nearby votive composition.

The notion of Christ's eternal authority was also thematized by the “Royal Deësis” at the bishopric of Rădăuți, where the Savior's open book contains an equally intriguing textual assemblage: “azx esmx svy(t) mirU 0 azx esmx sQi i pry/(d)e sQi” (I am the light of the world. I am existing and preexisting). This composite inscription brings together a frequently quoted phrase from John 8:12 and a fragment from a hymn of the Christmas Vespers, a combination which seems to be unique.<sup>29</sup> In addition, the version of the Deësis at Rădăuți enhances the paradoxical coexistence of Christ's divine glory and utmost humility through a subtle collaboration between textual and pictorial elements. Although he is depicted with all the insignia of royal and sacerdotal power, the “King of kings” surprisingly appears almost barefoot, without the imperial purple shoes (τζαγγία) included in the contemporary mural at Voroneț.<sup>30</sup> In the episcopal church at Rădăuți, the juxtaposition to the portraits of the voivodes on the western wall was probably meant to transform the iconographic references to the hidden kingship of Christ into a caveat for the monarch. In my opinion, these mural images were designed to admonish the Moldavian prince and perhaps a broader audience that true power was not conditioned by material ornaments. As source of royal authority, Christ had no need for such apparel in order to affirm his supreme dominion over all kings of the earth. Even if he had been invested with the attributes of power, the prince had to obey Christ as a faithful servant. Suggested by the donor portraits at St. Elijah, Voroneț, and Rădăuți, this role was explicitly bestowed upon the monarch by a prayer of imperial tradition, recited by patriarchs and metropolitans at the coronation of late medieval tsars and princes across the


Orthodox world: “O Lord, our God, ‘King of kings’ and ‘Lord of lords,’ you who have chosen your servant David through your prophet Samuel, and anointed him king over your people Israel, listen [to us,] the unworthy ones, to our prayers and look down from your holy abode, to your faithful servant (say the name), whom you have pleased to exalt [as] king over your holy people [emphasis added].”<sup>31</sup>

## **Emperors and Angels: Archetypes of the Monarch as the Servant of God**

The above-quoted prayer proves that, in the political thought of the Byzantine East, submission to Christ, the celestial sovereign, was an inherent element of ideal rulership. This particular view on the monarchic institution is further emphasized in Moldavian wall paintings through the association of Stephen III's portraits with several prototypes of the God-anointed ruler who acted as servant of Christ. As mentioned earlier, in the church of St. Elijah, the votive scene in the western bay of the nave was placed in close vicinity to the iconic figures of SS Constantine and Helena holding the True Cross. Vojislav Đurić points out that the Constantinian model created by middle Byzantine hagiography functioned as a “mirror” of the Eastern Roman emperors that was subsequently adopted by all Orthodox rulers across Eastern Europe.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the spatial correlation of royal and princely portraits with the figure of the first Christian emperor became a relatively common practice as evidenced by the mural decoration of numerous churches patronized by Bulgarian and Serbian monarchs.<sup>33</sup>

In the courtly environment of Moldavia, the devotion to Constantine the Great was fundamentally shaped by the image provided in a Church Slavonic encomium composed by Patriarch Euthymios of Tarnovo (in office 1375–93) in the last decades of the 1300s. Euthymios borrows and adapts narrative patterns and motifs from various Church historians, such as Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 260/265–339) and Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos (ca. 1256–1335), in an ample display of literary erudition and rhetorical skill, originally dedicated to Tsar Ivan Sishman (r. 1371–95), the last ruler of the Second Bulgarian Empire.<sup>34</sup> In 1474, this encomium was

copied alongside other hagiographical writings in a liturgical miscellany commissioned by Voivode Stephen III to the monk Jacob of Putna Monastery ([Figure 14.6](#)).<sup>35</sup> The Bulgarian patriarch presents Constantine mostly as an emperor serving God and his Church, engaged in a constant fight of defending and strengthening Orthodoxy. The militant aspect of the monarch's faith is introduced from the first section of the text in which Euthymios speaks about Constantine's privileged position in relation to Christ. The Savior is described as “Master, King, and Lord” of angelic armies, “the imprint of the unchanged image of the invisible Father” and the “Great High Priest.” The patriarch shows, then, how “the blessed Constantine proclaimed him [and] believed in him with his entire soul ...; Constantine the noble branch of good worship! Constantine, the apostolic zealot! Constantine the reinforcement of churches! Constantine who destroyed the idols! Constantine who proclaimed the good faith! Constantine who discovered the Cross! What more could I say?—Constantine, the imperial praise!”<sup>36</sup>

 A page with foreign text from the Moldavian copy of Patriarch Euthymios's Panegyric; a part of the text is in a different color.

[Figure 14.6](#) [The Moldavian copy of Patriarch Euthymios's Panegyric to the Holy, Great Emperors, equal to the Apostles, Constantine and Helena in the Slavonic miscellany of the monk Jacob, 1474, Putna Monastery, inv. nos. 571/II/1863 and 551/1952, fol. 136r.](#)

Source: Putna Monastery.

Similar to Euthymios's panegyric, the wall paintings at St. Elijah stress the symbolic connection between the holy emperor and the royal depiction of Christ. Placed on the northwestern wall of nave, between the “Royal Deësis” and Stephen III's donor portrait, Constantine's figure is invested with a double function as both archetype of the Christian ruler and an intercessor before the “King of kings.” Constantine's image acquired an analogous meaning in the contemporary church of the Venerable Cross at



Pătrăuți (after 1487), where he is featured as a mediator between the Savior and Voivode Stephen within the votive composition.<sup>37</sup> The recurring association between St. Constantine and the votive portraits of Stephen III shows that, in the last decades of the 1400s, the figure of “the father of all [Christian] emperors” became a constituent part of the model of ideal rulership assumed by the voivode of Moldavia.<sup>38</sup>

Although it was painted in the same period as the churches at Pătrăuți and St. Elijah, the mural program in the *katholikon* at Voroneț does not include Constantine's image alongside the princely effigies and the “Royal Deësis.” Nevertheless, the sovereign's status as a servant of Christ is still suggested through the less common analogy with the Archangels Michael and Gabriel. Inserted as tertiary figures in the Deësis scene, the two *Taxiarches* are depicted as courtiers of the heavenly king, vested in imperial garments and carrying ceremonial staffs.<sup>39</sup> These elements generate a pictorial correspondence with the sumptuous robes worn by Stephen III in the nearby votive composition. Most likely, this association relied on the traditional comparison of the monarchic office to the angelic ministry in the political thought of Byzantium. Just like angels, the basileus occupied an intermediary position in the space that separated God from humankind. His place within the hierarchy was fixed beneath the angels or, in rather exceptional situations, at the same level with the lowest celestial rank. As noticed by Catherine Jolivet-Lévy, in Byzantine imperial imagery, the similarities between the representation of the archangels and the features of the monarch's figure serve a twofold purpose. On the one hand, their visual resemblance exalted the royal power, pointing to its divine origins, but, on the other, it stressed their common subordination to Christ, the head of the universal hierarchy.<sup>40</sup> While archangels were regarded as God's messengers sent as guides of humanity in crucial moments of sacred history, the monarch acted as an earthly minister of the “King of kings,” invested to rule the Christian nation in his name.<sup>41</sup>

## Conclusion

In the late fifteenth-century churches patronized by Stephen III, the selection and spatial arrangement of mural images created a relationship of

symbolical continuity between the figure of the terrestrial prince and the eternal authority of Christ, the “King of kings” and “Great High Priest.” Adapting a preexisting repertoire of Byzantine and Balkan filiation, the designers of the iconographic programs at St. Elijah, Voroneț, Rădăuți, and possibly Bădeuți-Milișăuți elaborated ample representations of an ideal model of Christian rulership. In contrast to their forerunners, the association of princely portraits with the “Royal Deësis” in eastern Carpathian wall paintings was not meant to portray the monarch as Christ's terrestrial equivalent. I have argued that local iconographers reshaped the initial function of this pictorial analogy in order to express the ruler's submission to the eternal king in heaven. This change did not constitute a complete novelty but rather a shift of emphasis within the representation of the divine fundamentals of rulership inherited from Byzantium and the Balkans. The prince's role as Christ's faithful servant was further accentuated through the correlation with the iconic figure of the first Christian emperor, Constantine the Great, and, in the exceptional case at Voroneț Monastery, with archangels.

By pointing to some previously unexplored subtleties of late fifteenth-century programs, this study only sets the scene for a more comprehensive reevaluation of the visual instruments of constructing political legitimacy in the Principality of Moldavia. My observations concerning the representation of Stephen III as a humble monarch bowing before Christ's unfathomable majesty raise a further series of intriguing questions. One might wonder if these representations should be understood as part of a process of self-fashioning directed by the ruler himself or, rather, as an ideal image projected on the princely institution by other agents, very likely the high clergy. The possible parenetical dimension of Moldavian programs and their implicit role in negotiating power relations between temporal and spiritual authorities remain an open problem.<sup>42</sup> Further discussions on the meaning of Christ's local depictions as both King and High Priest in connection with other iconic representations of royal and ecclesiastic power might reveal new facets of this topic. Additionally, such an analysis could lead to a deeper understanding of the religious construction of political legitimacy within the broader context of Eastern Europe after the fall of Constantinople in 1453.<sup>43</sup>

## Notes

1. [Henry Maguire, “The Heavenly Court,” in \*Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204\*, ed. Henry Maguire \(Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1997\), 247–58, at 247–48, 257–58.](#)
2. [Gilbert Dagron, \*Emperor and Priest: The Imperial Office in Byzantium\*, trans. Jean Birrell \(Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003\), 23.](#)
3. [For a general discussion on this church, see Tereza Sinigalia, “Studiu pentru un proiect de restaurare: Biserica Sf. Ilie–Suceava” \[Study for a restoration project: The church of St. Elijah–Suceava\], \*Caietele restaurării\* 8 \(2019\): 112–38.](#)
4. [For circulation of this theme across Eastern Europe, see Àgnes Kríza, “The Royal Deesis–An Anti-Latin Image of Late Byzantine Art,” in \*Cross-Cultural Interaction between Byzantium and the West, 1204–1669: Whose Mediterranean Is It Anyway?\*, ed. Angeliki Lymberopoulou \(London: Routledge, 2018\), 272–90; Konstantinos M. Vapheiadis, “Sacerdotium and Imperium in Late Byzantine Art,” \*Niš i Vizantija\* 18 \(2020\): 55–87.](#)
5. [This biblical quote is used as the \*titulus\* of the scene: “\*pr̄y\(d\)xsta c+rc\ O desn\A tFbe 0 vx riza pozla{ena Odyana pryisp̄x\[ren\].\*” The Savior’s two epithets are tied in a single phrase that alludes to Psalm 109\(110\), Hebrews 7:17, and Apocalypse 19:16: “\*tq%I& esi arhiereJ c+rq c+rstvUA{e\*” \(You are High Priest, King of kings\).](#)
6. [Stephen III’s votive portraits have been examined by Ion Solcanu, “Portretul lui Ștefan cel Mare în pictura epocii sale” \[The portrait of Stephen the Great in paintings of his epoch\], in \*Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt, 1504–2004: Portret în istorie\* \[Stephen the Great and Holy, 1504–2004: Portrait in history\], eds. Maria Magdalena Székely and Ștefan Sorin Gorovei \(Putna: Editura Mușatinii, 2004\), 117–29.](#)
7. [On the notion of symbolic exchange in Byzantine votive images, see Rico Franses, \*Donor Portraits in Byzantine Art. The Vicissitudes of Contact between Human and Divine\* \(Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018\).](#)

8. [For the representation of David as a model of kingship, see Vasiliki Tsamakda, “König David als Typus des Byzantinischen Kaisers,” in \*Byzanz—das Römerreich im Mittelalter\*, eds. Falko Daim and Jörg Draschke \(Mainz: Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums, 2010\), 1:23–54. On Constantine as a model of rulership in Byzantium, see Vojislav Đurić, “Le nouveau Constantin dans l’art serbe medieval,” in \*Lithostroton: Studien zur byzantinischen Kunst und Geschichte; Festschrift für Marcell Restle\*, eds. Brigitt Borkopp-Restle and Thomas Steppan \(Stuttgart: A. Hiersemann, 2000\), 55–65.](#)
9. [The church of St. Prokopios was destroyed during World War I. Its iconographic program is known from the description published by Władysław Podlacha and Grigore Nandriș, \*Umanismul picturii murale postbizantine din Estul Europei\* \[The humanism of post-Byzantine wall paintings in Eastern Europe\], trans. Grigore Nandriș and A. I. Ionescu \(Bucharest: Editura Meridiane, 1985\), 1:301.](#)

The dating of Voroneț Monastery was proposed by Maria Ana Musicescu, “Considerații asupra picturii din altarul și naosul Voronețului” [Considerations on the paintings in the sanctuary and nave of Voroneț], in *Cultura moldovenească în timpul lui Ștefan cel Mare: Culegere de studii* [Moldavian culture in the times of Stephen the Great: Anthology of studies], ed. Mihai Berza (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Republicii Populare Române, 1964), 363–417, at 364–70.
10. [Constanța Costea, “John, the Persians’ Emperor,” \*Revue Roumaine d’Histoire de l’Art, Série Beaux-Arts\* 55 \(2008\): 31–44.](#)
11. [For general information concerning the murals, see Tereza Sinigalia, “Entre Pierre I<sup>er</sup> et Étienne le Grand,” \*Anastasis: Research in Medieval Culture and Art\* 6, no. 2 \(November 2019\): 9–30.](#)
12. [Matei Cazacu and Ana Dumitrescu, “Culte dynastique et images votives en Moldavie au XVe siècle: Importance des modèles serbes,” \*Cahiers Balkaniques\* 15 \(1990\): 14–64.](#)
13. [Anna Adashinskaya, “Moldavian Votive Portraits with Scrolls: Toward Rhetorical Techniques Applied in Art of the Late 15th–early 17th Centuries,” \*Revue Roumaine d’Histoire de l’Art, Série Beaux-Arts\* 54/55 \(2017–18\): 3–45, at 5–6.](#)

14. [Vlad Bedros, “The Monk Equal to the Martyrs? Moldavian Iconographic Instances,” \*Diversité et identité culturelle en Europe\* 12, no. 2 \(2015\): 45–62, at 54, 58.](#)
15. [Sorin Ulea, “Arta în Moldova de la mijlocul secolului al XV-lea până la sfârșitul secolului al XVI-lea: Pictura” \[Art in Moldavia from the middle of the fifteenth century to the end of the sixteenth century: Painting\], in \*Istoria artelor plastice în România\* \[The history of art in Romania\], ed. George Oprescu \(Bucharest: Editura Meridiane, 1968\), 1:349. See also Sorin Ulea, “Originea și semnificația ideologică a picturii exterioare moldovenesti \(I\)” \[The origin and ideological meaning of Moldavian exterior wall paintings \(I\)\], \*Studii și cercetări de istoria artei, Seria Artă plastică\* 10, no. 1 \(1963\): 57–93, at 62.](#)
16. [Dumitru Năstase, “Ștefan cel Mare împărat” \[Stephen the Great emperor\], in \*Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt\*, eds. Székely and Gorovei, 567–608, at 580–81.](#)
17. [Petre Guran, “Les implications théologico-politiques de l’image de la Deesis a Voroneț,” \*Revue Roumaine d’Histoire\* 44, nos. 1–4 \(2005\): 39–67; Andrei Dumitrescu, “Visions of the Incarnation: King David, the Imperial Deesis and Associated Iconographic Contexts in late 15th- and early 16th-century Moldavia,” \*Études byzantines et post-byzantines\* 4, no. 11 \(2022\): 131–74.](#)
18. [Svetlana Smolčić Makuljević, “Carski deisis i nebeski dvor u slikarstvu XIV veka manastira Trekavac: Program severne kupole priprate crkve Bogorodicinog Uspenija” \[The imperial Deesis and the Heavenly Court in fourteenth-century paintings of Trekavac Monastery: The program of the northern dome of the narthex of the church of the Assumption of the Mother of God\], in \*Treca jugoslovenska konferencija vizantologa: Kruševac 10–13 maj 2000\* \[Papers of the Third Yugoslav Byzantine Studies Conference: Kruševac May 10–13, 2000\], eds. Ljubomir Maksimović, Ninoslava Radošević, and Ema Radulović \(Belgrade: Vizantološki Institut SANU; Kruševac: Narodni muzej Kruševac, 2002\), 464–72.](#)
19. [Sašo Cvetkovski, “Portreti vizantinijskih i srpskih vladara u manastiru Trekavcu” \[The portraits of Byzantine and Serbian rulers in the monastery of Treskavec\], \*Zograf\* 31 \(2006\): 153–67, at 158–59.](#)

20. [Marka Tomić-Đurić, \*Freske Markovog Manastira\* \[The frescoes of Marko's Monastery\] \(Belgrade: Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Institute for Balkan Studies, 2019\), 392–99.](#)
21. [Henry Maguire, “Style and Ideology in Byzantine Imperial Art,” \*Gesta\* 28, no. 2 \(1989\): 217–31, at 223–27.](#)
22. [The comparison \(\*synkrisis\*\) of the Eastern Roman \*basileis\* to the Israelite rulers of the Old Testament and the founder of the Christian Empire was a common device of courtly rhetoric; see Claudia Rapp, “Old Testament Models for Emperors in Early Byzantium,” in \*The Old Testament in Byzantium\*, eds. Paul Magdalino and Robert Nelson \(Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2010\), 175–98.](#)
23. [Catherine Jolivet-Lévy, “L’image du pouvoir dans l’art byzantin à l’époque de la dynastie Macédonienne \(867–1056\),” \*Byzantion\* 57, no. 2 \(1987\): 441–70, at 442–43.](#)
24. [A French translation of this inscription has been published by Guran, “Implications théologico-politiques,” 42. Guran noticed that the second part of the text resembles Matthew 25:34 \(“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world’”\), emphasizing the eschatological meaning of the composition.](#)
25. [Andrew of Crete, “On the Nativity of the Supremely Holy Lady, the Theotokos, with Proof That She Descends from the Seed of David,” sec. 3, in \*Wider Than Heaven: Eighth-Century Homilies on the Mother of God\*, ed. and trans. Mary B. Cunningham \(New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2008\), 442–43.](#)
26. [Nikephoros of Constantinople, “Antirrheticus Tertius,” in \*Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Graeca\*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne \(Paris: Jacques-Paul Migne, 1863\), 100:396B–C.](#)
27. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, 397 A.](#)
28. [Throughout the late Middle Ages, the writings of both Andrew and Nikephoros were translated into Church Slavonic. In the current state of research, there is no direct proof of the circulation of these two particular texts in local manuscript production. However, Ion Radu Mircea has inventoried several other translations of their works copied](#)

- in the Moldavian and Wallachian environments, see *Répertoire des manuscrits slaves en Roumanie: Auteurs byzantins et slaves*, eds. Pavlina Bojčeva and Svetlana Todorova (Sofia: Institut d'Études Balkaniques, 2005), 704, nos. 26–27. Thus, we can assume that the interpretation of Christ's mystical kingship formulated by Andrew and Nikephoros was known in late fifteenth-century Moldavia. The importance of Nikephoros among local elites is also evidenced by his frequent inclusion in the procession of celebrating hierarchs depicted in Moldavian chancels. I am grateful for this suggestion to Dr. Vlad Bedros.
29. I have identified the Slavonic translation of this *sticherion* in the *Menaion* for December donated by Stephen III to the monastery of Dobrovăț, currently in the library of the Romanian Academy in Bucharest, MS Slav. 537, fol. 161v; see Petre P. Panaitescu, *Catalogul manuscriselor Slavo-Române și Slave din Biblioteca Academiei Române* [The catalogue of Slavo-Romanian and Slavic manuscripts in the library of the Romanian Academy], eds. Dalila-Lucia Aramă and George Mihăilă (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 2002), 2: no. 537. The connection between this poetical piece and the Deësis at Rădăuți is even more likely since the hymn begins with an invocation of Christ's eternal kingship: “Your kingdom, o Christ God, is the kingdom of all ages and your dominion throughout all generations” (my translation).
  30. Christ might have worn sandals. However, the current condition of the fresco at Rădăuți does not allow us to discern such details. We can notice the same peculiarity in the later depiction of the savior as the “Great High Priest” at the sixteenth-century metropolitan church of St. George in Suceava.
  31. The English translation is mine, based on the edition by Ivan Biliarsky, “Le rite du couronnement des tsars dans les pays slaves et promotion d’autres axiai,” *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 59 (1993): 91–139, at 103.
  32. Đurić, “Nouveau Constantin,” 58–59.
  33. Note: *Ibid.*, 56–58; Christopher Walter, *The Iconography of Constantine the Great: Emperor and Saint; with Associated Studies* (Leiden: Alexandros, 2006), 98–110.

34. [George Mihăilă, “Tradiția literară constantiniană de la Eusebiu al Cezareei la Nichifor Calist Xanthopoulos, Eftimie al Târnovei și domnii Țărilor Române” \[The Constantinian literary tradition from Eusebius of Caesarea to Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos, Euthymios of Tarnovo, and the voivodes of the Romanian Principalities\], in \*Cultură și literatură română veche în context european: Studii și texte\* \[Pre-modern Romanian culture and literature in the European context: Studies and texts\], ed. Gheorghe Mihăilă \(Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1979\), 217–80.](#)
35. [The manuscript is kept in the library of Putna Monastery \(inv. nos. 571/II/1863 and 551/1952\). This miscellany contains several lives of saints organized in accordance with the liturgical calendar. The Encomium of the Holy Emperor Constantine and Helena corresponds to their feast day on 21 May, fols. 136r–161v. For a critical edition of the text, see Euthymios, patriarch of Tarnovo, pohvalnoe st+Qmq velikQmq i ravnoap\(š\)lnQmq cre mq kwstantlnu i eleny \[Panegyric to the Holy, Great Emperors, Equal to the Apostles, Constantine and Helena\], in \*Cultură și literatură\*, 281–332.](#)
36. [Note: Ibid., 2, ed. Mihăilă. My translation.](#)
37. [Răzvan Theodorescu, “Această poartă a Creștinătății” \[This gate of Christendom\], in \*Artă și civilizație în timpul lui Ștefan cel Mare\* \[Art and civilization in the times of Stephen the Great\], eds. Răzvan Theodorescu, Ion Solcanu, and Tereza Sinigalia \(Bucharest: Monitorul Oficial, 2004\), 6.](#)
38. [“Πάντων βασιλέων ... πατήρ.” This epithet appears in the \*sticherion\* of the vigil for 21 May; see \*Μηναῖα τοῦ ὅλου ἐνιαυτοῦ\* \[Menaia for the whole year\] \(Rome, 1895\), 5:137.](#)
39. [On the representation of the archangels in imperial attire, see Maguire, “Style and Ideology,” 222–23; Catherine Jolivet-Lévy, “Note sur la représentation des archanges en costume impérial dans l’iconographie byzantine,” \*Cahiers Archéologiques\* 46 \(1998\): 121–27.](#)
40. [Jolivet-Lévy, “Note sur la représentation,” 123.](#)
41. [On the role of the angels, see Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, \*De coelesti hierarchia\* 9. 2–3, in \*Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita. De coelesti hierarchia, De ecclesiastica hierarchia, De mystica theologia, Epistulae\*, eds. Günter Heil and Adolf M. Ritter \(Berlin: De Gruyter,](#)



- 2012). The idea of the monarch ruling in Christ's name was explicitly proclaimed by the earlier mentioned prayer for the coronation, see Biliarsky, "Rite du couronnement," 106.
42. For some preliminary suggestions regarding this question, see Bedros, "Monk Equal to the Martyrs?," 58.
  43. The general Eastern European implications of this problem have been discussed by Guran, *Rendre la couronne au Christ: Étude sur la fin de l'idée impériale byzantine* (Heidelberg: Herlo, 2021). In spite of the comprehensive character of this study, a focused analysis of the Moldavian context, with a special emphasis on visual and liturgical sources, has to be completed.

15

ETHICS, PIETY, AND POLITICS  
IN *THE TEACHINGS OF NEAGOE  
BASARAB TO HIS SON  
THEODOSIE*

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*The Teachings of Neagoe Basarab to His Son Theodosie* (*Învățăturile lui Neagoe Basarab către fiul său Theodosie*), written by the Wallachian voivode Neagoe Basarab (ca. 1481/1482–1521), is considered one of the greatest literary achievements of ancient Romanian literature. As the first work of its kind in Romanian literature, it influenced the later development of the parenetic genre in Romanian as well as in post-Byzantine literature. As a matter of fact, the significance of the work was not restricted to its country of origin but encompassed the cultures of the post-Byzantine and Slavic spaces to which Wallachia was related not only through its religious dependence on Constantinople but also through its use of Slavonic.<sup>1</sup>

Belonging to the genre of mirrors for princes, Neagoe's writing renders an image of the ideal prince shaped by Byzantine and Slavonic sources.<sup>2</sup> Because of its debt to the Byzantine tradition, Neagoe's treatise remains ignorant of the developments in Western political thought that, starting in the fourteenth century, become sensitive to the economic welfare of the political community.<sup>3</sup> My study of Neagoe's work follows the approach of Mariana Goina, which pays a limited attention to the traditional issues of the text's authorship and originality.<sup>4</sup> This chapter deepens Goina's examination of Neagoe's writing with respect to Byzantine mirrors for princes by changing the focus from the care that a ruler is, by definition, forced to take of others to the care that he needs to take of himself. Thus, my research examines Neagoe's book by means of the concept of the “care of the self.” Developed by Michel Foucault (1926–84) in the *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, the care of the self concerns the self as a subject of reflexive activity, to which it applies different practices and exercises.<sup>5</sup> In applying Foucault's concept of the care of the self, I especially pay attention to the relation that, according to the Wallachian prince, should ideally exist between piety and politics and that is, therefore, at the core of his work.

### **Neagoe Basarab, Prince of Wallachia**

Neagoe Basarab ruled Wallachia between 1512 and 1521 and wrote the *Teachings* during his periods of intended or forced leisure. Founded in the fourteenth century, under the suzerainty of Hungary, the principality of Wallachia became increasingly dependent on the Ottoman Empire starting in the fifteenth century. Thus, it was attached canonically to the Orthodox Christian Church based in Constantinople and culturally to the Byzantine-Slav world.<sup>6</sup> Especially as it pertained to the Orthodox religion, Byzantine culture greatly influenced Wallachia through the mediation of the southern Slavs, the Bulgarians and the Serbs. Slavonic functioned as the language of the chancellery, of the culture, and of the religion in Wallachia until around the seventeenth century.<sup>7</sup>


Coined back in 1935, Nicolae Iorga's famous expression “Byzance après Byzance,” which refers to the survival of institutions and cultural practices in southeastern Europe after the fall of Constantinople, certainly applied to

the Wallachia of Neagoe Basarab.<sup>8</sup> Rulers like Neagoe adopted the model of the Byzantine imperial tradition, which, among others, led to a mixture of “ideas of political legitimacy” and “loyalty to religious Orthodoxy.”<sup>9</sup> In order to be able to aspire to the ideal of the Romano-Byzantine emperors, the Romanian princes were expected to behave like Orthodox princes, whose main attributes were deep faith and utter submission to the Church.<sup>10</sup> In so doing, the Romanian voivodes were supposed to pay attention to two main ideological aspects, namely war against the infidels and the protection of the Orthodox Church. Despite the heroic resistance of some iconic Romanian princes, like Stephen the Great (ca. 1438/39–1504) or Michael the Brave (1558–1601), after the defeat at the battle of Varna (1444), the position of southeastern Europe in front of the Ottomans was considerably weakened. Indeed, after its invasion by the troops of Mehmet II (1432–81) in 1462, Wallachia lost its claims to independence.<sup>11</sup> Though they became vassals of the Ottoman Empire, the princes of the Romanian principalities continued to pursue the Byzantine imperial ideal by patronizing the religious institutions of the Orthodox world, including the patriarchate of Constantinople and the monastic establishments of Mount Athos and Mount Sinai, up until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Neagoe belonged to the Craiovești boyar family, which, for almost a century, was the most influential in the country.<sup>12</sup> In order to present himself as the heir of the Basarab family, which was descended from Basarab I, the founder of Wallachia, Neagoe claimed to be the son of Basarab the Young, who reigned twice between 1477 and 1482 and took on the name of Basarab. Through religious, diplomatic, and matrimonial connections, he was related to the Serbian and, more broadly, the Slavonic world. Additionally, by tradition, the Craiovești family did not act only on the political but also on the cultural life of Wallachia. For instance, they were the patrons of Bistrița Monastery, an emblematic cultural place, which possessed one of the richest libraries in Wallachia. In keeping with his family's tradition, between 1514 and 1517, Neagoe erected the monastery of Curtea de Argeș, which stands as one of the most impressive religious edifices of post-Byzantine culture.

## Neagoe's *Teachings* in the Context of Byzantine Mirrors for Princes

The discovery of Neagoe's *Teachings* in three different linguistic versions, namely Middle Bulgarian Slavonic, Romanian, and Greek, contributed to what has been called the “Homeric question” of Romanian literature, referring to the polemics over the authorship, the original language, and the place of the conception of the *Teachings*.<sup>13</sup> The three versions are held in different places and cover, to different extents, the two main parts of the work of the Wallachian monarch.<sup>14</sup> The Slavonic version, included in MS 313 from the SS Cyril and Methodius National Library in Sofia, contains the two parts of the text, though incompletely ([Figure 15.1](#)). Dating from almost the same time as the Slavonic version, the Greek one, which is preserved in MS 221 from the Dionysiou Monastery on Mount Athos, possesses only the second part of the text. The Romanian version exists in some nine manuscripts, among which the best, MS 109 conserved at the Library of the Romanian Academy in Cluj, probably made around 1635 by the scholar Udriște Năsturel at the court of Matei Basarab (r. 1632–54), provides the most complete form of the two parts of the text ([Figure 15.2](#)). The controversies about whether Neagoe was the real the author of the text are, in part, fueled by the fact that the Greek version, in addition to being almost simultaneous with the Slavonic one, was handwritten by the scholar Manuel of Corinthus (d. 1530). While there are still some questions about authorship that remain to be answered, there is consensus concerning the original language, the time, and the place of writing for Neagoe's *Teachings*: it seems to have been written in Slavonic, between 1517 and 1521, at Neagoe's court. Hence, this study underscores Neagoe's authorship of the text in a broad way, which takes into account the fact that our understanding of the concept of authorship does not coincide with the medieval one and allows for different possible levels of interaction between Neagoe and his circle or his sources.

 A page with foreign text of the teachings of Neagoe Basarab to his son Theodosie; a part of the text is in a different color.

[Figure 15.1 Facsimile of the Teachings of Neagoe Basarab to His Son Theodosie \(Învățăturile lui Neagoe Basarab către fiul său Theodosie\).](#)

Source: Museum of printing and old Romanian book [Muzeul Tipăriturii și al Cărții Vechi Românești], Târgoviște.



A page with foreign text of the teachings of Neagoe Basarab to his son Theodosie; a part of the text is in a different color.

[Figure 15.2 Facsimile of the Teachings of Neagoe Basarab to His Son Theodosie \(Învățăturile lui Neagoe Basarab către fiul său Theodosie\).](#)

Source: Museum of printing and old Romanian book [Muzeul Tipăriturii și al Cărții Vechi Românești], Târgoviște.

The text is divided into two parts, of unequal length.<sup>15</sup> The first part is composed of three thematic pieces: the general principles of a monarchy, whose origin lies in God; the annotated examples of kings taken from the Old Testament as well as of the unique figure of Constantine the Great; and a series of moral lessons. The second part is mostly made of a series of more pragmatic pieces of advice referring to the princely relationship with piety, ethics, politics, society, and family. While the first part is structured around a compilation of sources accompanied by comments, the second part is more personal, in many cases using the sources in support of a particular argument. While the Wallachian voivode does not indicate the sources he used, these have been identified by scholars in the recent editions of the text.

As political and cultural “testament,” Neagoe's *Teachings* are part of the Byzantine tradition of mirrors for princes, usually understood as a genre of parenetic literature, composed of works of advice dedicated to princes.<sup>16</sup> The Byzantine mirrors for princes rely on themes that, before being Christianized during late antiquity by authors like Themistius (d. ca. 388 CE) or Synesius (d. after 412 CE), were initially developed during the

Hellenistic and classical periods by authors like Isocrates.<sup>17</sup> The Byzantine versions date back to a sixth-century work addressed by Agapetus to Justinian I. Byzantine mirrors for princes are often belittled on account of what is thought to be their lack of original political thought: In D. M. Nicol's words, the Byzantine texts are “set pieces, designed partly to flatter the recipient, partly to display their author's rhetorical expertise and erudition,” considered more a “genre of literature rather than of thought.”<sup>18</sup> Against this limited understanding of originality, the possible form of the mirror in Neagoe's *Teachings* is still a matter of debate. In this respect, Goina advocates for a thought-provoking theory which, countering the idea that the writing of the Wallachian ruler is original through its practical pieces of advice, suggests that it is anchored in its time through its use of Byzantine-Slavonic sources.<sup>19</sup>

Broadly speaking, the ruler's portrait that is presented by Neagoe derives from the image of the ideal emperor that is conventionally depicted by the Byzantine mirrors for princes. Originating in the works of Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 260/265–339) devoted to Emperor Constantine the Great (ca. 272–337), Byzantine political thought perceived of the emperor as “God's viceregent or viceroy on earth presiding over a monarchy that reflected the higher and more perfect order of heaven.”<sup>20</sup> Consequently, the emperor possessed an absolute power that was based on divine right. As the image of God on earth, the Byzantine sovereign was supposed to make his subjects ready for Heaven.<sup>21</sup> As far as he is concerned, Neagoe stresses that monarchical rule, so long as it is founded on divine right and imitates that of God, could achieve a significance that is not only secular but also spiritual:

Think, my dear, of the great emperor, who loved us and made us emperors on land, like himself, and his wish for us is to be emperors in heaven as well; and if we want, we will be, provided that we do good and we shall be emperors and we shall rule forever.

Vezi, iubitul meu, pre împăratul cel mare, care ne-au iubit și ne-au făcut și pre noi împărați pre pământu, ca și pre sine, și-i iaste voia să

fim și în cer; și dacă vom vrea noi, vom fi, numai să facem bine și vom fi împărați și vom împărați în véci.<sup>22</sup>

Though, ideally, it is not restricted by any other human being, the voivode's absolute power is not, in fact, totally unlimited. The limitations of princely power should, moreover, come from the prince himself. Traditionally, a pivotal element of the mirrors for princes was represented by an outline of their moral and spiritual virtues, which did not change much across various historical periods or cultural and geographical spaces.<sup>23</sup> In keeping with the pattern of virtues that a leader is expected to have, the Wallachian ruler argues that, besides the moral cardinal virtues—namely prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance—a prince should also possess specifically princely virtues, like clemency and liberality.<sup>24</sup> Though these precise terms, widely referenced in the mirrors for princes, do not appear as such in Neagoe's *Teachings*, the meaning usually attributed to them overlaps with the moral practices described by the Wallachian ruler.

The argument in favor of the moral qualities of a monarch develops against a background that, besides the vanity of the world, highlights the precariousness of the princely life and authority. Despite whatever extent princely power may reach, there is no guarantee against a complete reversal that may shorten its already-limited existence.

### **The Pious Sources on the Care of the Self**

In order to counteract the weakness of the ruler's position, the practice of piety is a necessity that cannot be downplayed. As shown later, piety cannot be dissociated from the care for the self. In focusing on the relation between piety and inner life, my research aims at furthering the theory of the “change of heart,” which was developed by Quentin Skinner and discussed by Goina.<sup>25</sup> More precisely, among the virtues fundamental to the mirrors of princes because of the implicit acknowledgement of the impossibility of transforming the institution, this study focuses on piety, which, according to the Wallachian voivode, should be central to all the other virtues.

Though it is not termed as such, the concept of the care of the self underlies the whole approach to monarchical education advocated for by



Neagoe in his *Teachings*. The care of the self appears, among others, in the plea for the “renewal of the inner man” (să ne înnoim omul cel dinnăuntru) and lends itself to the analyses developed by Michel Foucault in the *Hermeneutics of the Subject*.<sup>26</sup> According to Foucault, the care of the self, which represents a capital moment in the history of subjectivity, is synonymous with the active thought that concerns the inner person.<sup>27</sup> Thus understood, the care of the self has three major points of origin: born out of the Socratic-Platonic philosophy, it reached its “golden age” during the first two centuries after Christ and was afterward adopted by Christianity through the Christian asceticism of the fourth and fifth centuries. During each of the periods, it had a different purpose. Socratic-Platonic philosophy perceived it as auxiliary to the care of the city-state. Late antique Roman philosophers, like Seneca or Marcus Aurelius, argued that it represented its own end. Christian ascetics of the fourth and fifth centuries held that it had to lead to self-renunciation.

Neagoe's *Teachings* are fertile ground for an interpretation based on Foucault's understanding of the care of the self, especially in connection with Christian spirituality. According to the *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, the subject of Christian spirituality is the “Christian athlete,” seen as “especially someone who has an enemy, an adversary, who keeps him on guard ... with respect to himself ... inasmuch as the most malign and dangerous powers he has to confront (sin, fallen nature, seduction by the devil, etcetera) are within himself.”<sup>28</sup> Inspired by the “model of old Stoic suspicion towards oneself,” Christian spirituality developed a series of exercises for self-knowledge, circumscribed in the care of the self, which “basically consisted in this decipherment of the self as a tissue of impulses of thought and of the heart, which carry the mark of evil and which may be instilled in us by the close or even internal presence of the Devil.”<sup>29</sup>

Following contemporaneous Christian practice, Neagoe's *Teachings* seek spirituality through prayer. In so doing, the Wallachian ruler stresses the necessity of prayer by citing the sixth-to-seventh-century Byzantine monk John Climacus:

For the prayer is the reunion of the individual with God, and after the creation of the world is invitation and reconciliation with God, mother

and afterwards daughter of tears; it is cleansing of sins, obstacle to lusts, soothing of sadness, shattering of wars ... The prayer is indeed for the one who prays judgement before the judgement of God that will come.

Că ruga iaste ducere și împreunare omului cu Dumnezeu, iar după tocmeala lumii iaste pohtire și împăcare cu Dumnezeu, și mumă și apoi și fată lacrărilor; păcatelor iaste curăție, ispititurilor pod, întristăciunilor mîngîiare, rășboaielor sfărâmare; ... Ruga cu adevărat iaste celui ce să roagă judecată mai nainte încă decît judecata lui Dumnezeu care va să fie.<sup>30</sup>

This excerpt from Climacus's *Ladder* is highly significant since the work is considered a “masterpiece of Byzantine spiritual guidance.”<sup>31</sup> Though primarily addressed to an audience of monks, it was also, more broadly, targeted at anyone interested in spiritual ascent.<sup>32</sup> A means and not an end in itself, prayer is the act that allows individuals to save themselves and to unite with God through love.<sup>33</sup> Thanks to the divine loving response, prayer leads to the forgiveness of sins and the protection against the harmful passions that may take those who pray away from God. Practiced against a temporal understanding in which every moment is seen as potentially the last one, prayer is thought to actively contribute to salvation.

While dealing with the care of the self, Neagoe highlights the importance of mental preparation for the Last Judgment, which needs to develop after a cleansing from sins. In this respect, the Wallachian prince uses an excerpt from Symeon the New Theologian, a tenth-to-eleventh-century Byzantine monk who relied on Climacus, as one of his inspirational sources:

Therefore, my brothers, let us as well clean our minds from all the bad things and the sly thoughts, which God does not love, and to wake up from the slumber of sins, like from drunkenness, and to always think of the Day of the Right Judgment, the day of darkness and of storm, the day of trumpets and of feuds, the day of care and of fear [of all people].

Dreptu acéia, fraților, și noi să ne curățim mințile de toate lucrurile céle réle și de cugetele céle hicléne, care nu le iubéște Dumnezeu, și să venim în viața noastră și să ne trezim mintea din somnul păcatelor, ca dintr-o beție, și să cugetăm totdeauna de ziua judecății cei drépte, zioa întunerecului și a viforului, zioa trînbitelor și a gîlcevilor, zioa grijii și a fricii [a tuturor oamenilor].<sup>34</sup>

It is not by chance that Neagoe employs a quotation from Symeon the New Theologian in this context since the Byzantine monk attributed a key role to the “purity of the inner” in his theological thought.<sup>35</sup> The purity of the soul is one of the outcomes of the prayer that can eventually lead to unity with God, and it is the result of the constant struggle against the malevolent strategies of the Devil. Indeed, according to Neagoe, well aware of the miraculous benefits of the prayer, the evil spirit is a constant threat:

Similarly, when [the Devil] sees the individual praying, talking to God and being filled with his kindness and words, the dark Satan abandons everything else and keeps staying there, hoping to ruin the kindness of God, like the venomous snake hopes to do with the eggs of the camel-ostrich.

Așijderea și întunecatul satana, cînd véde [pre om] că stă pre rugă și vorbéște cătră Dumnezeu și iaste plin de bunătăți și de cuvintele lui Dumnezeu, toate le lasă și stă tot acolo, ca doară ar strica bunătățile lui, ca și aspida oaole stratocamilului.<sup>36</sup>

The story of the two legendary animals, drawn from the *Physiologos*, a Byzantine adaptation of an Indian collection of fables mostly known from an Arabic version, enables Neagoe to present, in a vivid and thought-provoking way, the potentially fatal dangers represented by the Devil's attempts to distract the Christian believer from prayer.<sup>37</sup>

The internal purity resulting from care of the self seems a less abstract ideal when approached from the perspective of daily activities. In the view of the Wallachian prince, the incessant practice of prayer is supposed to

encompass a careful and thoughtful analysis of the actions made during the day:

Every day think about where you have been and what you have done and how you want to die and after death where you want to go and be careful .... And avoid to let any hour pass without a prayer, for it brings light into the soul. And if you have achieved good things, do not boast about them and if you perpetrated many evil things, do not be too worried, provided that you no longer do them and you repent for them.

În toate zilele cugetă unde ai fost și ce ai făcut și cum vei să mori și după moarte unde vei să mergi și te ia aminte ... . Și te păzește să nu te treacă vreun ceas fără' de rugă, că acéstea aduc lumina în suflet. Și de ai făcut lucruri bune, tu nu te lăuda, iar de ai făcut răutăți multe, nu te îngrija de tot, ce numai să te părăsești să nu mai faci și te vei spăsi.<sup>38</sup>

In this passage, two types of mental exercises underlie prayer that, according to Foucault, pertain to the care for the self: the meditation on one's own death and the account of the actions one made during the day.<sup>39</sup> Since it is the aim of life, the believer needs to constantly prepare for life after death by an anticipation centered around permanent prayer. Ceaseless prayer is able to provide a deep understanding of what actions are really worthwhile and how their possible consequences could be amended and integrated into the search for salvation. The permanent analysis of behavior whose moral aspect is grounded in its spiritual value starts from the idea that the end of life is imminent, and consequently, every day needs to be lived to its full advantage in order to gain further arguments in favor of redemption.

### **The Care of the Self with Respect to Politics**

Though it is a fundamental element of the care of the self as presented by Neagoe in his *Teachings*, the quest for spirituality does not exclude another practice of the care of the self that Foucault identifies in Roman philosophy

and especially in Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations*. Despite the fact that, unlike the Roman emperor, Neagoe argues for a care of the self that is not oriented toward itself but toward the ideal of the union with God, the Wallachian ruler seems to agree with the Roman emperor-philosopher on the idea that, in caring for the self, the political leader tends not only to his own good but also to that of his subjects. According to the thoughts of Marcus Aurelius as interpreted by Foucault, “It is in caring for himself that he will inevitably care [for others].”<sup>40</sup>

Since every successful political action or decision has a divine origin, the monarch needs to be capable of complying with God's demands: “And the ruler who has a right mind, he possesses all the goodness. Because first he takes care of God's things, then he also fulfils God's will on earth” (Iar domnul carele iaste întreg la minte, la acela sîntu toate bunătățile. Că întîi lucrurile lui Dumnezeu le lucrează, apoi umple și voia lui Dumnezeu pe pămînt).<sup>41</sup> The “right,” “good,” or “clean” mind is synonymous with a mind that does not yield to the Devil and is, therefore, able to carry out God's projects for the world. The care of the mind, which, in this case, obviously refers to the self, takes the form of prayer that does not aim at the rejection of the Devil only for the spiritual good but also for a secular purpose. More precisely, if the ruler fails to receive God and falls prey to evil, the prince thwarts not only his own afterlife but also the lives of his subjects in this world.

In the view of the Wallachian voivode, the monarch has to practice a care of the self that is based on the precise understanding of the role that he has to fulfill, which is inferior to God but superior to any of his subjects:

And if you give your honor to somebody else, think that you were neither gathered by God to be all rulers, nor to be the shepherds of his flock, but he chose only you and made you the shepherd of his flock. So, if you are not diligent to know your flock and to share justice to all of them, what kind of ruler and shepherd will you be called, when you allow all to interfere in the things of your reign and to be rulers like you, or to meddle in the earnings of your country?

Și de vei da cuiva cîntea pentru voia cuiva, cugetă că nu v-au adunat Dumnezeu să fiți toți domni, nici să fiți toți păstori turmei lui, ci

numai pre tine te-au ales și te-au pus să fii păstoriu turmei sale. Deci, de nu vei fi tu harnic să cunoști turma ta și să le împarți tuturor pre dreptate, ce domn și ce păstor te vei chema, când vei lăsa să să amestece toți în lucrurile domnii tale și să fie domni ca și tine, sau să să bage în venitul/țărâi tale?<sup>42</sup>

Consequently, the understanding of the unique nature of the monarchical position is intrinsic to the correct exercise of power. The awareness of the divine origin of his authority should make the ruler, on the one hand, govern alone and, on the other hand, treat each of his subjects according to their rank and worth. Embodying the biblical image of the shepherd-king, the monarch is responsible for a social order built upon a combination of political and spiritual aims.

The abstract reasonings underlying the care of the self that the ruler should practice with respect to his political duties are, on several occasions, accompanied by concrete pieces of advice. For example, Neagoe warns his son against drinking. Though, at first glance, such vices affect the body, passions like drinking are dangerous because they also injure the spirit:

And similarly for the ruler: as long as his mind is sane, all the armies look for him and gather around him, like around the flag. And all take knowledge and wisdom from him, and not only the servants and the people in his country, but also others from other countries wish to take knowledge and advice from him. And if he sets free his body to debauchery and drinking and other bad things, which God does not like and he loses faith in the support of God and becomes mad in loathing him, hence God becomes angry with him. And God does not bring any worse trouble for him except for the fact that he takes away his mind from him and deprives him of it. Therefore, if he is devoid of the mind, you will no longer see a good thing from the body of that ruler, and he will no longer have honor from his servants or from other rulers who will be around him, and he will deserve irony and insult. And the servants will have their hearts hurt about him and the love and longing for him will be taken away.

Așijderea iaste și domnul: pînă stă / mintea lui într-însul întreagă, toate oștile se strîngu împrejurul lui, și lui caută, ca și împrejurul steagului. Și toți iau învățătură și înțelepciune de la dînsul și încă nu numai slugile și oamenii den țara lui, ci și alții dintr-alte țări poftescu să ia învățătură și sfat de la dînsul. Iar deaca slobozêște domnul trupul său spre curvie și spre beții și spre alte lucruri réle, care nu le iubêște Dumnezeu, și-și pîiarde nădêjdea și firea lui Dumnezeu și nebunêște în sila lui, de-aciia Dumnezeu să mînie pre dînsul. Și nu-i face alta nevoe mai rea, ci numai ce-i ia mintea și-l lipsêște de dînsa. Deacii, deaca să lipsêște de minte, ia den trupul acelui domn nici un lucru bun nu vei vedea, nici el nu va mai avea nici o cinste de slugile lui, nici de alți domni care vor fi carii vor fi împrejurul lui, ci va fi numai de rîs și de ocară. Și [slugilor] lor li să vor râni inimile despre dînsul și li să va lua dragostea și dorul de către dînsul.<sup>43</sup>

Though absolute in theory, the power of the voivode is actually dependent on the immaterial asset represented by the prestige that is normally a consequence of his status. More precisely, the monarchical authority is, among others, based on the way in which, through his behavior, the ruler proves to be in possession of knowledge and judgment that transform him into a model worthy of emulation by the whole world. Relying on joint secular and spiritual meaning, the great respect that the ruler enjoys from his subjects cannot be dissociated from his allegedly privileged relation with God, which is a “honor” that depends on the sovereign's right mind and wisdom.<sup>44</sup> Weakness in the face of the urges of the body is likely to deprive the ruler, first, of divine favor and, second, of the importance and affection that are transferred to him from God. Therefore, the care of the self also concerns the relationship between the mind and the body that, if practiced correctly, allows the former to fulfill the ideal of being in control of the latter.

## Conclusion

Without neglecting the visible part of the individual, which is the body, the care of the self that is taught by the Wallachian monarch is fundamental to

the ideal formation of a Christian ruler. Strongly grounded in the Byzantine secular and theological literature, Neagoe's *Teachings* are a late representative of the centuries-old tradition of Byzantine mirrors for princes. The care of the self, which lies at the core of Neagoe's princely advice, is structured around a piety that is supposed to underlie all of a ruler's political actions and thoughts. Besides that, it is worth mentioning that Foucault's concept of the care of the self is only one possible approach to the way in which Neagoe's *Teachings* deal with the relationship between spirituality and political practice. Another possible approach, which, however, would require further research, concerns whether the Wallachian voivode shaped his writing at least partly in response to the principles of Hesychasm, a type of monasticism that became popular in Wallachia around his time.<sup>45</sup> A different research direction could investigate how Neagoe's conception of the care of the self may have been indirectly influenced by Stoicism, about which Neagoe may have learned through the writings of the Church Fathers. These possible avenues for research are proof of the richness of thought intrinsic to Neagoe's *Teachings*.

## Notes

1. [I would like to thank the director and staff of the Museum of the Printing and the Old Romanian Book \(Muzeul Tipăriturii și al Cărții Vechi Românești\) in Târgoviște for their kind support. Andrei Pippidi, \*Tradiția politică bizantină în țările române în secolele XVI-XVIII\* \[The Byzantine Political Tradition in the Romanian Countries in the Sixteenth—Eighteenth Centuries\] \(Bucharest : Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1983\), 59; Matei Cazacu, “Slavon ou grec, traduction ou adaptation? Comment on composait un ouvrage parénétiq ue en Valachie au début du XVIe siècle \(\*Les Enseignements du prince Neagoe Basarab à son fils Théodose\*\),” in \*Traduction et traducteurs au Moyen Âge. Actes du colloque international du CNRS organisé à Paris, IRHT, 26-28 mai 1986\* \(Aubervilliers: IRHT, 1989\), 41-50 here 42.](#)
2. [Pippidi, \*Tradiția politică bizantină\*, 57–59.](#)



3. [See, for instance, Cary Nederman, “The Opposite of Love: Royal Virtue, Economic Prosperity, and Popular Discontent in Fourteenth-Century Political Thought,” in \*Princely Virtues in the Middle Ages 1200–1500\*, eds. István Bejczy and Cary Nederman \(Turnhout: Brepols, 2007\), 177–90.](#)
4. [Mariana Goina, “Medieval Political Philosophy in a Sixteenth-Century Wallachian Mirror for Princes: The Teachings of Neagoe Basarab to His Son Theodosie,” in \*Slavonic and East European Review\* 92, no. 1 \(2014\): 25–43, at 25.](#)
5. [Michel Foucault, \*Hermeneutics of the Subject\*, ed. Frédéric Gros \(London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005\), 1–41 \(“6 January 1982”\).](#)
6. [Cazacu, “Slavon ou grec,” 257–60.](#)
7. [See, for instance, Matei Cazacu, “La littérature slavo-roumaine au Moyen Âge \(XV<sup>e</sup>–XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles\),” \*Études balcaniques, Cahiers Pierre Belon\* 4 \(1997\): 83–103.](#)
8. [Paschalis Kitromilides, “The Byzantine Legacy in Early Modern Political Thought,” in \*The Cambridge Intellectual History of Byzantium\*, eds. Anthony Kaldellis and Niketas Siniosoglou \(Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017\), 653–68, at 653.](#)
9. [Note: Ibid.](#)
10. [Note: Ibid., 658–60.](#)
11. [Dimitri Obolensky, \*The Byzantine Commonwealth. Eastern Europe, 500–1453\* \(New York: Praeger, 1971\), 259–60.](#)
12. [G. Mihăilă, “Studiu introductiv” \[Introductory study\], in \*Neagoe Basarab, Învățăturile lui Neagoe Basarab către fiul său Theodosie\*, eds. Florica Moisil and Dan Zamfirescu, trans. G. Mihăilă \(Bucharest: Minerva, 1970\), 79–83; Cazacu, “Slavon ou grec,” 43–45.](#)
13. [The expression “Homeric question” was coined by Demostene Russo, in \*Studii Byzantino-Române\* \(Bucharest, 1907\), 14–15; see quotation in Goina, “Medieval Political Philosophy,” 29. For an overview of the controversy, see Dan Ioan Mureșan and Petre Ș. Năsturel, “\*Δὸ καθολικὸς βασιλεὺς ἃ ἰ ἀὐθέντης κατολικός\*: Notes sur les avatars d’une idée politique,” in \*Études byzantines et post-byzantines\*, eds. Emilian Popescu, Tudor Teoteoi, and Mihai Ovidiu Cătoi \(Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 2011\), 6:251–82, at 253–56.](#)

14. [Cazacu, “Slavon ou grec,” 45–48.](#)
15. [Dan Zamfirescu, “Studiu introductiv” \[Introductory study\], in Basarab, \*Învățăturile lui Neagoe Basarab\*, 28–55.](#)
16. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, 25.](#)
17. [Johannes Niehoff-Panagiotidis, “Avoiding History's Teleology: Byzantine and Islamic Political Philosophy,” in \*Global Medieval Mirrors for Princes Reconsidered\*, eds. R. Forster and N. Yavari \(Boston: Ilex Foundation, 2015\), 112–21, at 114–16; Günter Prinzing, “Byzantine Mirrors for Princes: An Overview,” in \*A Critical Companion to the “Mirrors for Princes” Literature\*, eds. Noëlle-Laetitia Perret and Stéphane Péquignot \(Leiden: Brill, 2022\), 108–35.](#)
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19. [Goina, “Medieval Political Philosophy,” 37–43.](#)
20. [Nicol, “Byzantine Political Thought,” 52.](#)
21. [Note: \*Ibid.\*; Paul Magdalino, “Basileia: The Idea of Monarchy in Byzantium, 600–1200,” in \*Cambridge Intellectual History of Byzantium\*, eds. Kaldellis and Siniosoglou, 575–98, at 580.](#)
22. [Basarab, \*Învățăturile lui Neagoe Basarab\*, 128. All the translations from Romanian into English are mine.](#)
23. [Goina, “Medieval Political Philosophy,” 33; Pippidi, \*Tradiția politică bizantină\*, 57.](#)
24. [Quentin Skinner, \*The Foundations of Modern Political Thought\*, vol. 1, \*The Renaissance\* \(Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1978\), 126–28.](#)
25. [Skinner, \*Foundations of Modern Political Thought\*, 228; Goina, “Medieval Political Philosophy,” 33–34.](#)
26. [Basarab, \*Învățăturile lui Neagoe Basarab\*, 230.](#)
27. [Foucault, \*Hermeneutics of the Subject\*, 1–41 \(“6 January 1982”\).](#)
28. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, 322 \(“24 February 1982”\).](#)
29. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, 422 \(“17 March 1982”\).](#)
30. [Basarab, \*Învățăturile lui Neagoe Basarab\*, 317.](#)
31. [Peter Brown, \*The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity\* \(New York: Columbia University Press, 1990\), quoted in John Chryssavgis, \*John Climacus: From the\*](#)

- [\*Egyptian Desert to the Sinaite Mountain\* \(London: Routledge, 2016\), 10.](#)
32. [Chryssavgis, \*John Climacus\*, 115–46 \(“John Climacus and the Ladder”\).](#)
  33. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, 211–32 \(“The Ascetic at Prayer”\).](#)
  34. [Basarab, \*Învățăturile lui Neagoe Basarab\*, 287–88.](#)
  35. [Hannah Hunt, “Byzantine Christianity,” in \*The Blackwell Companion to Eastern Christianity\*, ed. Ken Parry \(Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell, 2007\), 73–93, at 87.](#)
  36. [Basarab, \*Învățăturile lui Neagoe Basarab\*, 251.](#)
  37. [Charris Messis and Stratis Papaioannou, “Section 3. Arabic,” in \*The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Literature\*, ed. Stratis Papaioannou \(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021\), 195–218, at 203–6.](#)
  38. [Basarab, \*Învățăturile lui Neagoe Basarab\*, 226.](#)
  39. [Foucault, \*Hermeneutics of the Subject\*, 357–58 \(“3 March 1982”\), 159 \(“27 January 1982”\).](#)
  40. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, 201–2 \(“3 February 1982”\).](#)
  41. [Basarab, \*Învățăturile lui Neagoe Basarab\*, 297.](#)
  42. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, 294.](#)
  43. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, 296.](#)
  44. [Augustine Casiday, “Neagoe Basarab,” in \*The Orthodox Christian World\*, ed. Augustine Casiday \(London: Routledge, 2012\), 310–17, at 314.](#)
  45. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, 314–16.](#)

16

## SOPHIA

# The Personification of Divine Wisdom in the Lower Danube Region

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The figure of Sophia—Divine Wisdom personified in the female form—was rooted in three Old Testament texts (the Book of Proverbs, the Wisdom of Sirach, and the Wisdom of Solomon) and has been long present in Byzantine civilization. The Fathers of the Eastern Church, wanting to reconcile the pre-Christian (Judaic) religious ideas with the message of the Gospel, quite unanimously accepted that Sophia should be identified with Christ—the Word of God (Logos). Despite occupying an important place in Byzantine theological discourse, homiletics, and hymnography, as well as being the patroness of the most important churches in the empire and in the areas inhabited by Orthodox Slavs (including the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople and churches in Ohrid, Sredetz [now Sofia], Kyiv, and Novgorod the Great), for many centuries, the personification was only sporadically depicted on icons, mosaics, wall paintings, and miniatures. It was so rare that no specific canon of her iconography was formed. This

situation changed profoundly at the end of the thirteenth century in the Balkans. In a significant development in Balkan art between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries—which was unique both geographically and historically—Sophia began to be depicted as a young woman, dressed in ancient Greek attire, resembling a muse. The representation may have become popular during the last cultural revival in the history of the Byzantine Empire, characterized, like the Macedonian era, by a return to the patterns and models drawn from the iconography of Greco-Roman antiquity (the so-called Palaiologan Renaissance).<sup>1</sup>

The emergence of a new iconographic motif rooted both in ancient Greco-Roman imagery and the Judeo-Christian tradition, in the art of the lower Danube region in the late thirteenth century should be considered a part of a wider phenomenon. This period, characterized by crossing political, societal and religious boundaries, adapted the specific ideas, thoughts, and motifs of many diverse spheres of cultural production (visual arts, literature), and crafts (goldsmithing, tailoring, architecture).<sup>2</sup> What is more, these changes cannot be studied in isolation from those taking place in the Nemanjići dynasty at the time (1166–1371). Since the time of Archbishop Sava (in office 1219–35) and King Stefan the First-Crowned (r. 1217–28), successive Serbian rulers and ecclesiastical authorities have made efforts—as described in several other chapters of this volume—to develop an original system of self-presentation showcasing their secular and clerical power (albeit inspired by Byzantine models). This system presupposed the sacralization of the monarch and the dynasty as a whole and emphasized their ties with divine protectors and inspirers. The process intensified especially in the early fourteenth century, after the marriage between King Stefan Uroš II Milutin (r. 1282–1321) and Simonida Palaiologina, daughter of the Byzantine emperor Andronikos II (r. 1282–1328).

The aim of this chapter is to present the emergence and dynamics of a new iconographic motif (rooted in the Greco-Roman, Judaic, and Christian, especially Eastern Christian–Byzantine, traditions) and its manifestations in geographically diverse parts of the region and different spheres of cultural production (above all, in the visual arts). There are four sections. First I look at the oldest images of Sophia, which evoke the Holy Trinity. I then

turn to the iconography of Sophia as the “Christian muse” in the monumental art and then in miniature illumination. My last section deals with the motif of the so-called Wisdom's Feast—an illustration of the Old Testament's passage: “Wisdom hath built herself a house” (Prov 9:1–6). In it, I analyze only examples of monumental art since this iconography is absent in miniature painting.

### **Sophia as the Holy Trinity**

Let us start by looking at the oldest image of Sophia preserved in the area of the lower Danube region. The personification of Divine Wisdom most likely appeared for the first time in a wall painting at the church of the Mother of God Peribleptos (also known as St. Clement) in Ohrid, dated to 1295. An enigmatic creature with three heads surrounded by a common nimbus leans over a sleeping man, dressed in rich, almost imperial attire. Behind the figure's back, a pair of outstretched wings is visible. The sleeping figure is probably the biblical King Nebuchadnezzar. The creature that accompanies him is much more difficult to interpret. Some researchers suggest it as an angel.<sup>3</sup> However, many elements of the figure (its delicacy; the purple chiton clearly outlining the breasts; and the long, intricately styled hair) support the thesis that we are dealing with an image of Sophia, who gives inspiration to the sleeping ruler.<sup>4</sup>

The matter is further complicated by the fact that representations of three-headed, winged figures are extremely rare in Eastern Christian art. Apart from the image analyzed here, only a few other depictions of this type are known, including a wall painting from 1318–21 decorating the interior of the *katholicon* of the Hilandar Monastery on Mount Athos; a fourteenth-century image from the Georgian Zarzma Monastery; and an image from the monastery of the Most Holy Mother of God in Matejče (1355). The depiction of Sophia as a three-headed being may indirectly suggest her connection with the Holy Trinity (as opposed to Eastern Christian patristic literature, where the Old Testament Wisdom of God is identified specifically with the second person of the Trinity, Christ—the Word of God).

Images of this kind also appeared in the Danube region in later times. An example is a seventeenth-century icon located in the collection of the Museum of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Belgrade. It shows the Holy Trinity in the form of a three-headed woman, clad in imperial red-gold robes, which brings to mind icons of Sophia, created in Novgorod the Great.<sup>5</sup>

### **Sophia as Muse in Monumental Art**

The personified Divine Wisdom with a single head also appears at least twice in the interior decoration of the church of Saint Sophia in Ohrid, dating from the beginning of the fourteenth century. The northern wall of the altar space is decorated with a puzzling composition: a graceful girl, dressed in antique clothing, leans over a sleeping John Chrysostom. The figure's head is uncovered and surrounded by a nimbus, and her long hair is held back by a band. Unfortunately, the inscription accompanying the image has not survived. Nevertheless, Cvetan Grozdanov concludes that the mural depicts Divine Wisdom in the role of the “Christian muse,” giving inspiration to John Chrysostom. Sophia is depicted in a completely different way in a painting made around 1346, which is located in the narthex of the Ohrid church. Here we find a composition illustrating the events described in the Second Book of Samuel (2 Sm 12:1–23): King David, kneeling at Nathan's feet, begs God for forgiveness of the sin of adultery. Two beings watch the scene: an angel with a sword drawn toward the ruler and Divine Wisdom. She is wearing a purple chiton, revealing her hands and arms. Her uncovered head, with carefully draped hair, is surrounded by a nimbus. The personification is also depicted here with angel wings.<sup>6</sup>

As early as the beginning of the fourteenth century, the personified Divine Wisdom became one of the “staple” motifs appearing in the iconographic program of the interior decoration of Serbian temples. In the standard program, the figure of Sophia accompanies the representations of the Evangelists, traditionally placed on the four pendentives, under the main dome. An early variant of this type of composition can be found in the paintings made during the reign of Stefan Uroš II Milutin (likely 1309–13) in the church of Our Lady of Ljeviš in Prizren ([Figure 16.1](#)). Between the

four silhouettes of the creators of the New Testament, two figures of Divine Wisdom appear, between each pair of Evangelists. Sophia is depicted as a young girl, dressed in a light chiton, revealing her hands and arms. Her head is uncovered and surrounded by a nimbus. Behind her back, a pair of wings spreads out. Sophia seems to be stretching her arms toward the Evangelists, handing each of them a scroll of parchment, probably as a visible sign of spiritual inspiration.<sup>7</sup>



*Figure 16.1* [Sophia between two Evangelists, mural painting, 1309–13, the church of Our Lady of Ljeviš in Prizren.](#)

*Source:* Anna Adashinskaya.

The oldest example of this iconography appears in the paintings, dated to about 1317, that decorate the pendentives of the church of St. George in Staro Nagoričino. Here we find images of St. John and St. Mark, unfortunately preserved only in fragmentary form. They are writing their



works under the dictation of Sophia, who is located behind their backs (the other two images are almost completely illegible). The tracings made in the 1960s allow us to conclude that originally a figure of Divine Wisdom was placed on all the pendentives, taking the form of a young woman with wings.<sup>8</sup>

Most likely, analogous images adorned the pendentives of the church of St. Nicholas, built near the settlement of Čučer, near Skopje. Sadly, the paintings made around 1320 were later almost completely destroyed. A tracing made in the 1960s only allows us to discern that a figure of winged Sophia accompanied the representation of St. John and his disciple Prochorus. Hovering over the latter's head, the personified Wisdom seemed to dictate the words of divine revelation to the Evangelist and his helper.<sup>9</sup>

As a “Christian muse,” sending inspiration to the Evangelists, Sophia also appears in the paintings located on the pendentives of the church of the Holy Mother of God Hodegetria in Peć (the official seat of the metropolitan and, since 1346, the patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church). Although only the images of the three Apostles have survived to the present day (the painted decoration of one of the pendentives was irretrievably lost), the existing parts of the temple's original interior decor allow us to assume that, initially, a female personification of Divine Wisdom was placed next to the figure of each Evangelist. The preserved depictions are remarkably homogeneous: in each of the three extant images, Sophia is shown in the same pose, standing behind the saint who hunches over his work, with a scroll of parchment in her hands. Her robes, which seem antique in style, differ in detail from one composition to the next but are generally in the same purple-and-blue color scheme. On each of the pendentives, Sophia is depicted with her head uncovered, a golden nimbus, and outspread wings. The inscriptions found next to the images read: “премудрост.”<sup>10</sup>

According to Svetozar Radojčić, these paintings were created between 1324 and 1337, that is, during the period when Archbishop Danilo II held the position of head of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Considering that sapiential motifs appear quite often in his writings (e.g., in the *Life of King Uroš* we find clear references to the Book of Proverbs), we can assume that placing Divine Wisdom on the paintings in Peć was not a matter of chance.<sup>11</sup>

A unique variant of the motif can be found in the paintings of 1349, which decorate the pendentives of the church of the Archangel Michael in Lesnovo. The figure of Divine Wisdom does not appear next to the figures of the Evangelists but accompanies representations of four Fathers of the Eastern Church: John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nazianzus, Basil the Great, and Athanasius of Alexandria. The most unusual of these is the depiction of John Chrysostom. The saint, bent over the open codex, is in the presence of two people. Behind the back of the Golden-Mouthed, we see St. Paul, who had been depicted with John in Byzantine art since the eleventh century. Above the figures of the saints hovers Sophia, portrayed as a winged woman, dressed in a purple chiton that exposes her arms. She places her left hand on John Chrysostom's forehead. Her head is surrounded by a nimbus of puzzling shapes: behind the classic round halo of a golden hue, there is also a white rhomboidal figure. The three other Church Fathers portrayed in Lesnovo appear in an almost identical poses, as scribe stooped over their work, but they are accompanied only by Divine Wisdom, depicted as a woman dressed in antique attire. Sophia's head is uncovered, surrounded by a round-rhomboidal nimbus. Behind her back, a pair of spread wings can be seen.<sup>12</sup>

The classical presentation of the motif recurs in the paintings that decorate the interior of the church of the Ascension in the Ravanica Monastery (1375–77). Most likely, there were originally three images of the personified Divine Wisdom inspiring the Evangelists (St. John was depicted only with his disciple Prochorus). Today, only two images survive: the scene of the transmission of inspiration to Matthew and Mark. In Ravanica, Sophia, who in earlier paintings tended to hover above the saints, is now situated close to them. She almost appears to press her face against the shoulder of the writer to whom she is bestowing divine inspiration. This kind of portrayal, emphasizing the intellectual understanding and emotional closeness between the Evangelist and Sophia, may be a Christianized variant of the ancient canonical type that pictured a philosopher or artist in the company of his muse.<sup>13</sup>

A different approach to the iconographic motif in question is found in the painting made at the turn of the fifteenth century at Jošanica Monastery. Divine Wisdom is not depicted here in the company of an Evangelist or one

of the Church Fathers; instead, her figure is placed right next to the image of Cosmas of Maiuma. The association of the figure of Sophia with the famous eighth-century Byzantine hymnographer stems from the fact that he is credited with writing the troparion of the first song of the Lauds for Holy Thursday canon, a work containing clear references to sapiential topology.

The female personification of Divine Wisdom also appears in the paintings (1412–18) decorating the interior of the Holy Trinity Church in Resava/Manasija Monastery.<sup>14</sup> Images of this type, usually placed on pendentives under the main dome, can be found inside several other fifteenth-century Serbian religious buildings, including the temple of the Mother of God in the Nova Pavlica Monastery. Depictions of Sophia also feature in the paintings decorating the pendentives under the central dome of the church of St. Panteleimon in Nerezi (Skopje area) ([Figure 16.2](#)).



[Figure 16.2 Sophia with St. Mathew, mural painting, late sixteenth century, the church of St. Panteleimon in Nerezi.](#)

Source: Zofia A. Brzozowska.

The original twelfth-century polychromy of the upper parts of the church's interior was lost in an earthquake in 1555. The architectural elements of interest were later rebuilt and covered with paintings in the sixteenth century. It was then, perhaps, that the preserved images of the Evangelists inspired by Divine Wisdom were created. Most likely, the figure of Sophia appeared on all four pendentives. Today, only three of these depictions have survived (the image of St. Mark is almost completely destroyed).<sup>15</sup>

### **Sophia as Muse in Manuscript Illumination**

As we have seen, Sophia appeared often in Balkan wall paintings in the fourteenth century to inspire the Evangelists or, less frequently, of the Fathers of the Eastern Church. During the same period, this motif also seems to have entered the realm of miniature painting in south Slavic manuscripts. The figure of the personified Divine Wisdom, which closely resembles ancient images of muses, appears in miniatures illustrating the contents of Serbian manuscripts (mostly Gospel books) created in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

An example of the motif used in a fourteenth-century Serbian illumination appears in the *Tetraevangelion* of Patriarch Sava from Hilandar Monastery on Mount Athos (no. 13/572). This manuscript was most likely made by order of Patriarch Sava IV (in office 1354–75). Divine Wisdom appears in three miniatures, accompanying the depictions of St. Matthew (fol. 9), St. Mark (fol. 98), and St. Luke (fol. 155); St. John is pictured on fol. 249 with his disciple Prochorus. The image of the Evangelist Matthew hunched over his work, inspired by Sophia standing behind him, was incorporated into a circle by the maker of the miniature. Sophia betrays the strong influence of antique aesthetics. The personified Wisdom is portrayed as a slender young woman with carefully styled brown hair held up with a

headband tied over her forehead, the loose ends of which are clearly visible on both sides of her face. Her rich attire, styled on ancient Greek chiton, is also worthy of note: Sophia wears a gold-embroidered tunic, under which a floor-length dress and purple shoes are visible. Oddly, there is not a nimbus around her head. On folio 98 of the *Tetraevangelion* of Patriarch Sava, the image of St. Mark is inscribed in the shape of a Greek cross with rounded ends, reading a scroll spread out on his knees. Sophia stands behind the Evangelist's chair, pointing with her left hand to the open codex lying on the lectern. As in the miniature discussed earlier, Divine Wisdom here resembles a muse in her appearance. The scene of St. Luke's inspiration is set into a square field. The Evangelist, engrossed in preparing his writing utensils, is accompanied by a standing Wisdom. Her left hand is extended toward the saint, while her right one, bent at the elbow, is held by her chest. All three iterations of Sophia are inscribed “премоудрост.”<sup>16</sup>

The figure of the personified Sophia inspiring Matthew, Mark, and Luke can also be found on the miniatures adorning the *Tetraevangelion* from the Kumanica Monastery, now kept in the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences in Belgrade (MS 69).<sup>17</sup> An interesting and richly illuminated *Tetraevangelion*, made in the Balkans around 1427–29, is now housed in the National Library of Russia in St. Petersburg (MS F.I.591). The personified Divine Wisdom appears on four frontispiece miniatures, accompanying the Evangelists at work. A common feature of all the compositions is the positioning of the figures: Sophia is always very close to the Evangelist she inspires, often embracing or cuddling against him.<sup>18</sup>

As we can see, the vast majority of images of Sophia the Inspirer from the lower Danube region are associated with Serbian culture. It seems that this motif was a phenomenon almost completely unknown in Bulgarian art. However, there is no doubt that the motif appeared in artifacts created on the northern side of the Danube. This is evidenced, for example, by the miniature on folio 67' of a Greek Gospel book written in 1594 by Luke the Cypriot in Buzău, in Wallachia (The Walters Art Museum, MS W. 535). It features a depiction of St. Matthew with a winged figure behind his back, following the canon developed in the Balkans in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Sophia, clad in bluish-purple robes trimmed with gold, leans into the Evangelist's ear, pointing with her right hand to the book he holds in his

lap. Her head is surrounded by a round golden nimbus. The author of the painting may have been a Rus' artist, which is indicated by the Church Slavonic inscription “духъ” placed next to the figure of Divine Wisdom, which also evokes associations with the Holy Spirit.<sup>19</sup> However, we have to bear in mind that images of St. Matthew often pose interpretive problems since his symbol is an angel. If there is no inscription next to the image, the accompanying figure can only be identified by a comparative analysis with the other Evangelist portraits: if they are depicted with their symbols (lion, ox, and eagle), it is obvious that Matthew is shown with an angel not Sophia. Sometimes, however, there is not enough comparative source material to make a clear identification.

The examples presented earlier allow us to assume that the motif of Sophia the Inspirer found its full development only in late medieval Serbian painting. In this context, it seems worthwhile to ponder the models on which the artists of that region based their work. Serbian art historians (including Svetozar Radojčić and Branislav Todić) are of the opinion that the source of inspiration for the iconographers, associated with the court of King Stefan Uroš II Milutin, were not contemporary Greek images but were more likely Byzantine miniature painting from the period of the so-called Macedonian Renaissance. Perhaps a Byzantine, tenth- through thirteenth-century manuscript (similar to Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS gr. 139; St. Petersburg, National Library of Russia, MS gr. 269; or Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Palat. Gr. 381) containing “classicizing” images of the personified Wisdom made its way to Serbia in the first half of the fourteenth century and became the model for later depictions of Sophia.<sup>20</sup>

### **Divine Wisdom's Feast**

In the late thirteenth century, another way of depicting Sophia appeared in the art of the lower Danube region, illustrating the story from the Old Testament's Book of Proverbs about the personified Divine Wisdom, who builds a house for herself and then holds a sumptuous banquet (Prov 9:1–6). This motif is unknown in Byzantine art.<sup>21</sup> Certainly, the oldest surviving example of the iconography of the Wisdom's Feast (Пир Премудрости) is a

painting located on the southern wall of the narthex of the Mother of God Peribleptos and St. Clement Church in Ohrid, dated to 1295. Here, the personified Sophia occupies the left side of the composition and takes the form of a young woman, dressed in ancient Greek fashion (a bluish-purple chiton with short sleeves and gold trim around the neck). She is seated on a throne with her bare feet on a footstool. Her left hand points to the table in front of her. Her head is uncovered, and her long dark-brown hair is held up with a band. A pair of outstretched wings can be seen behind Sophia's back. The Ohrid representation is a rather faithful illustration of the text in Proverbs. Next to the figure of Sophia appears a table on which are a bread bowl, a jug of wine, and a book, opened on the verse Proverbs 9:5: “Ἔλθετε φάγετε τῶν ἔμῶν ἄρτων καὶ πίετε” (Come, eat my food, drink the wine I have prepared!). The objects on the table and the quotation seem to be a clear allusion to the sacrament of the Eucharist. On the right-hand side of the composition, Sophia's three servants are portrayed as attractive young women, dressed—like their mistress—in an antique fashion. One of them holds an amphora, while the other two carry loaves of bread. Behind them is a sizeable building in the shape of a three-nave basilica, surrounded by a portico with seven columns. Most likely, this image represents of the house of Wisdom described in the Book of Proverbs, supported by seven pillars.

Another version of Wisdom's Feast is found in the painting that adorns the eastern wall of the narthex of the church of the Introduction of the Mother of God to the Temple, part of the monastic complex of Hilandar on Mount Athos ([Figure 16.3](#)). Unfortunately, the original polychromy of the church's interior, probably created around 1320–21, underwent extensive renovations at the beginning of the nineteenth century, which altered significant portions of the original paintings. However, according to experts on the subject, the composition that exists today—illustrating Proverbs 9:1–6—can, with a certain degree of uncertainty, be considered a fourteenth-century monument, made at the behest of Serbian King Stefan Uroš II Milutin.<sup>22</sup>







[Figure 16.3 Sophia, mural painting, 1320–21, Hilandar Monastery on Mount Athos.](#)

*Source:* Elżbieta Myślińska-Brzozowska.

Around the same time, King Stefan II commissioned another representation of Wisdom's Feast. The painting, dated to 1321, decorates the east wall of the altar of the church of the Annunciation of the Mother of God in the Gračanica Monastery ([Figure 16.4](#)). Sophia is seated in the center of the composition, at a table bearing only parchment and writing instruments. She is covered by a sleeveless purple robe, clearly outlining her bust. Her head is uncovered and surrounded by a golden round nimbus. Behind her back is a pair of wings, spread for flight. In her left hand, she holds a scroll of parchment; in her right, a reed. In spite of a rather casual approach to the subject, there is no doubt that the painting is, in fact, another illustration of the story from the ninth chapter of Proverbs. This is confirmed by a clear inscription in the upper register of the painting: “прѣмдростьъ съза себѣ храмъ.” Behind the back of the personified Wisdom, there is a portico with seven columns. The artist also made room for Sophia's servants in the painting: they approach the table at which their mistress sits from both sides, and their silhouettes—similarly to the Ohrid composition—reveal the strong influence of antique aesthetics. However, in this case, the artists also display an unusual inventiveness: both the flowing robes of the two girl attendants and their musical instruments (tambourines?) suggest that they are dancers or musicians rather than ordinary servants. Through the skillful placement of the figures, the composition—similarly to that from the Hilandar Monastery—evokes associations with the images of the Old Testament Trinity. In the interior design of the church of the Annunciation, the image of the three angels hosted by Abraham and Sarah is placed near the scene of Wisdom's Feast.



*Figure 16.4* [Wisdom's Feast, mural painting, 1321, Gračanica Monastery.](#)

Source: Zofia A. Brzozowska.

Undoubtedly, the most developed form of the Proverbs composition is found in the paintings created between 1343 and 1348 to decorate the vault of the St. Nicholas Chapel in the Serbian Visoki Dečani Monastery. The cycle consists of four thematically related scenes, which are extremely faithful illustrations of the story from the ninth chapter of Proverbs. In the painting located in the western part of the vault, Sophia sits on a throne, next to a table set for a banquet. Her image follows the canon of the personified Divine Wisdom popular in fourteenth-century Serbian painting: she is dressed in a light-pink chiton, trimmed with a gold band around her neck, and a green himation. Her head is uncovered and decorated with a nimbus, composed of two shapes—a golden circle, behind which the outline of a rhombus is visible. A pair of wings stretches out behind her back. In her left hand, Sophia holds a scroll of parchment, while her right hand is raised. In the background appears a fantastic building, which is certainly an image of Sophia's house. An inscription of Proverbs 9:1 is in the upper register of the composition: “Wisdom has built her house; she has set up its seven pillars.” In the northern part of the vault, there is a painting illustrating Proverbs 9:3–4: “She has sent out her servants, and she calls from the highest point of the city: ‘Let all who are simple come to my house!’” Again we see a table laden with food and behind it two winged figures, most likely Sophia's servants. The figure on the left of the composition holds a loaf of bread in her hands, while her companion raises a cup of wine. Thus, the interpretative context of the representation is expanded with clear Eucharistic connotations.

The third scene, located in the eastern part of the vault, is the most poorly preserved. In the center of the composition stands a table under a purple canopy. The figure on the left side of the painting can be interpreted as an image of the personified Divine Wisdom, inviting people to a banquet—recalling the previously mentioned paintings from Ohrid and Hilandar Monastery. The image was probably captioned with a quotation from Proverbs 9:5: “Come, eat my food.” In the final southern quadrant, we find a composition modeled on paintings depicting the scene of the Communion of the Apostles. The fact that the winged figure on the left side of the painting wears identical robes as the figure of Sophia in the first scene of the cycle suggests that this is also a personification of Wisdom. She leans toward the group of people pictured next to her, handing a cup of wine to

the man standing closest to her. The upper part of the representation bears an inscription from Proverbs 9:5: “Drink the wine I have mixed!”

It is worth noting that the discussed motif appeared later in paintings decorating churches in Moldavia, including the church of the Resurrection in the Sucevița Monastery (late sixteenth century). In the interior of this sanctuary, we find a depiction of Wisdom's Feast, bringing to mind the images from Ohrid and Hilandar. Sophia is seated on the left side of the composition, holding a bowl in her left hand. She wears imperial robes (similar to those on the icons from Novgorod the Great): a purple-and-gold sakkos with a loros and a wide collar. Her head is crowned with a diadem and a nimbus composed of a circle and two intersecting rhombuses. From the right side, a group of angels and Church Fathers approach the table before her. Above the figures, there is a canopy, over which appears a Church Slavic inscription—a quotation from the Book of Proverbs: “прѣмѣдростъ създа себе храмъ.” The inscription “IC XC,” placed directly next to the figure of Sophia, reminds the viewer that the personified Wisdom from the Old Testament, according to Eastern Christian theology, should be identified with Christ.<sup>23</sup>

Between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, this iconography for Proverbs 9:1–6 became widespread in the lower Danube region, and by the mid-fourteenth century, it had spread to Rus’ as well.<sup>24</sup> Sophia is usually presented as a young woman, dressed in ancient Greek clothing (including a chiton and himation). Her head is surrounded by a nimbus composed of several shapes: a circle and a rhombus or two. In the southern Slavic lands, the personified Divine Wisdom is also depicted with angel wings. In images of this type, there is a tendency to identify Sophia with Christ, which was dominant in the Church Slavic literature. In Romania and Rus’, her figure is sometimes coupled with the monogram “IC XC,” characteristic of images of the Savior. On all the examples discussed previously, clear references to Eucharistic symbolism are also discernible.

## Conclusion

The depiction of Divine Wisdom in the form of a young woman who inspires the saints or who appears in a scene illustrating the Book of

Proverbs is a phenomenon of the lower Danube region between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries. The fact that the earliest images of this kind date back to the turn of the fourteenth century and are preserved in sacred spaces located in the territory of the Serbian Kingdom suggests that the iconography of the personified Divine Wisdom was developed during the reign of King Stefan Uroš II Milutin. In that period, he annexed the northern Macedonian lands and married Simonida Palaiologina, underscoring the perceived intensification of Byzantine influence in Serbian culture. The placement of the images of Sophia in the interiors of such prestigious buildings as the headquarters of the head of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Peć, as well as in nearly all royal endowments of the time, indicates that the new iconographic motif was part of the broader propagandistic efforts by this ruler and his circle. The images developed at the time were geared at strengthening the sacralization of the monarch and dynastic rule by indicating ties to the heavenly protection and inspiration. The writings of Archbishop Danilo II may have subsequently contributed to the rooting of ideas about Sophia in the Serbian cultural space and the belief in her connection to the “sacred dynasty” of the Nemanjići. Danilo left behind a number of hagiographic works dedicated to Serbian rulers, including Stefan Milutin's mother, Helena of Anjou. According to tradition, which in Byzantium dated back as far as the fourth century and could be traced in the writings of Eusebius of Caesarea, Danilo connected the female ruler in particular with the virtue of wisdom.<sup>25</sup> Further research into the phenomenon of the personified Divine Wisdom in Serbian culture would therefore need to take a broader look at the intellectual climate in the Nemanjići dynasty during the reign of Stefan Milutin and his successors (including Stefan Dečanski and Stefan Dušan) and to analyze iconographic sources in parallel with literary texts of the period.

From the areas ruled by the Nemanjići dynasty (Serbia, northern Macedonia), the motif made its way to Rus' (late fourteenth century) and to Wallachia and Moldavia (sixteenth century). The female personification of Divine Wisdom, on the other hand, is almost completely absent from the Bulgarian art and culture of the late Middle Ages. The identification of Old Testament Divine Wisdom with Christ, the Incarnate Word—which originated in Eastern Christian patristic literature—was strongly rooted in

this area. Moreover, in fourteenth-century Bulgaria, especially in monastic circles, Hesychastic thought spread, along with iconography inspired by it, such as the composition of Christ, Wisdom, and the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit, the earliest surviving example of which is the painting from the so-called Hrelja Tower in the monastery of Rila (1335).<sup>26</sup> It is beyond the scope of this paper to examine the historical background behind this emerging composition (did artists working for the Bulgarian monastery want to create something unprecedented and original or were they inspired by a texts than their contemporary Serbian colleagues?), but the topic is ripe for investigation. Interdisciplinary research is extremely promising in this matter, which links the iconographic program of the wall paintings with the motifs predominant in Byzantine literature in the fourteenth century.<sup>27</sup> One clear conclusion from this study: in Bulgaria, Sophia had the face of Christ Emmanuel, while in other parts of the lower Danube region, the personification took the form of a young woman in a classic attire.

## Notes

1. [Zofia A. Brzozowska, \*Sofia—upersonifikowana Mądrość Boża: Dzieje wyobrażeń w kręgu kultury bizantyńsko-słowiańskiej\* \[Sophia—the personification of Divine Wisdom: The history of the notion in Byzantine-Slavonic culture\] \(Łódź: Łódź University Press, 2015\), 198–226.](#)
2. [See also the chapters by Anita Paolicchi and Nikolaos Vryzidis in this volume.](#)
3. [Maria V. Marini Clarelli, “Personificazioni, metafore e allegorie nell’arte paleologa,” in \*L’arte di Bisanzio e l’Italia al tempo del Paleologi 1261–1453\*, eds. Antonio Iacobini and Mauro della Valle \(Roma: Argos, 1999\), 58.](#)
4. [Cvetan Grozdanov, “O živopisu na severnom zidu narteksa Bogorodice Perivlepte \(Svetog Klimenta\) u Ochridu” \[The polychromy of the northern wall in the narthex of the Mother of God Peribleptos and St. Clement Church in Ohrid\], \*Zograf\* 36 \(2012\): 109–14.](#)

5. [Branislav Todić, \*Serbian Medieval Painting: The Age of King Milutin\* \(Belgrade: Draganić, 1999\), 60, 83, 105, 165, 351, 354.](#)
6. [Cvetan Grozdanov, \*Sveta Sofija, Ochrid\* \[St. Sophia, Ohrid\] \(Zagreb: Turistkomerc, 1988\), 7–8, 40.](#)
7. [Branislav Živković, \*Bogorodica Ljeviška: Crteži fresaka\* \[Bogorodica Ljeviška: The paintings\] \(Beograd: Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of Serbia, 1990\): i.](#)
8. [Branislav Todić, \*Staro Nagoričino\* \[Staro Nagoričane\] \(Belgrade: Prosveta, 1993\), 75–96.](#)
9. [Mirjana Gligorijević-Maksimović, “Classical Elements in the Serbian Painting of the Fourteenth Century,” \*Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta\* 44 \(2007\): 365–66.](#)
10. [Sreten Petković, \*The Patriarchate of Peć\* \(Belgrade: Serbian Patriarchate, 2009\), 30–31.](#)
11. [Svetozar Radojčić, “La table de la Sagesse dans la littérature et l’art serbes,” \*Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta\* 16 \(1975\): 223.](#)
12. [Zaga Gavrilović, “Divine Wisdom as Part of Byzantine Imperial Ideology: Research into the Artistic Interpretations of the Theme in Medieval Serbia Narthex Programmes of Lesnovo and Sopoćani,” \*Zograf\* 11 \(1980\): 46–47.](#)
13. [Branislav Živković, \*Ravanica: Crteži fresaka\* \[Ravanica: The Paintings\] \(Beograd: Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of Serbia, 1990\): i.](#)
14. [Branislav Todić, \*Manastir Resava\* \[Resava Monastery\] \(Belgrade: Draganić, 1995\), 55–56, 114.](#)
15. [Ida Sinkević, \*The Church of St. Panteleimon at Nerezi: Architecture, Programme, Patronage\* \(Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2000\), 39, 98.](#)
16. [Jovanka Maksimović, “Les miniatures byzantines et serbes vers le milieu du XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle,” in \*Dečani et l’art Byzantin au milieu du XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle\*, ed. Vojislav J. Djurić \(Beograd: SAN, 1989\), 141.](#)
17. [Svetozar Radojčić, \*Tekstovi i freske\* \[Texts and frescoes\] \(Novi Sad: Matica srpska, 1965\), 18.](#)
18. [Branka Vranešević, “Primer personifikacija Božanske Premudrosti u Radoslavljevom jevanđelju” \[An example of personifications of](#)

- [Divine Wisdom in the Radoslav Gospel](#)], *Niš i Vizantija* 9 (2011): 377–87.
19. [See images at “Walters Ms. W.535 Gospel lectionary,” \*The Digital Walters\*](#), accessed March 19, 2022, <https://www.thedigitalwalters.org/Data/WaltersManuscripts/html/W535/description.html>.
  20. [Svetozar Radojčić, \*Odabrani članci i studije, 1933–1978\* \[The selected articles and essays, 1933–1978\] \(Novi Sad: Matica srpska, 1982\), 70; Todić, \*Serbian Medieval Painting\*, 95.](#)
  21. [Zofia A. Brzozowska, “Wisdom Has Built Her House \(Prov 9:16\): The History of the Notion in Southern and Eastern Slavic Art in the 14th–16th Centuries,” \*Studia Ceranea\* 5 \(2015\): 33–58 \(with further bibliographic references to the topic of depictions of Proverbs 9 in the south Slavic art\).](#)
  22. [Ivan M. Đorđević, “Darovi Svetog Ducha u proskomidiji Bogorodičine crkve u Morači” \[Gifts of the Holy Spirit in the Prothesis of the Church of the Virgin at Morača\], in \*The Monastery of Morača\*, eds. Branislav Todić and Danica Popović \(Belgrade: Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 2006\): 196.](#)
  23. [Nicoletta Isar, “L’espacce iconique—inscription et transfiguration: La rhétorique paradoxale de l’image sacrée à l’âge post-byzantin,” \*Scripta & e-Scripta\* 3/4 \(2005/6\): 203–7; Angela Jianu and Violeta Barbu, eds., \*Earthly Delights: Economies and Cultures of Food in Ottoman and Danubian Europe, c. 1500–1900\* \(Leiden: Brill, 2018\), 201–2.](#)
  24. [The newest, most comprehensive monograph about Sophia’s iconography in the Eastern Slavic area \(especially, in Novgorod\): Ágnes Kriza, \*Depicting Orthodoxy in the Russian Middle Ages: The Novgorod Icon of Sophia, the Divine Wisdom\* \(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022\).](#)
  25. [Dragiša Bojović, \*Trpeza Premudrosti\* \[The banquet of Wisdom\] \(Niš: Punta, 2009\), 62–80.](#)
  26. [Marini Clarelli, “Personificazioni,” 59.](#)
  27. [Justin L. Willson, “The Allegory of Wisdom in Chrelja’s Tower Seen through Philotheos Kokkinos,” in \*Byzantium in Eastern European Visual Culture in the Late Middle Ages\*, eds. Maria Alessia Rossi and Alice Isabella Sullivan \(Leiden: Brill, 2020\), 14–35.](#)



SHAPING IMAGES OF SANCTITY  
AND KINGSHIP BETWEEN  
BYZANTIUM AND SERBIA  
DURING THE NEMANJIĆI  
DYNASTY

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The chapter focuses on a facet of Serbian ruler Stefan III Uroš Dečani's (r. 1321–31) imagery as the ideal king and saint of the Nemanjići dynasty: his relationship with St. Nicholas. By addressing both the textual sources and the images that shape this relationship, I aim to contribute to the understanding of the Nemanjići dynasty's royal ideology and its relation to Byzantine models. The legendary protection St. Nicholas gave Stefan III constituted an exceptional means of legitimization of royal power for himself and for his designated heir, Stefan IV Dušan (r. 1331–55). Moreover, pictorial depictions and written sources that describe St.

Nicholas's miracle in favor of the king offer new perspectives on the rhetorical background of royal imagery. Here, I argue that a parallelism is extended between Stefan III and the ultimate saint-ruler, Emperor Constantine the Great (r. 306–37).

## Contemporary Sources

Stefan III Uroš Nemanja, son of Stefan Uroš II Milutin (r. 1282–1321), is also known as Stefan Dečani from his most impressive enterprise, the monastery of Dečani (1327–35) in the region of Methonja, in present-day Kosovo. Stefan III's patronage of Dečani encouraged his posthumous fame that lead to his canonization, and his relics there became the focus of almost unprecedented devotion.<sup>1</sup> The canonization of kings was a solid tradition of the Nemanjići dynasty, and it represents a point of uniqueness of sovereign ideology in the newborn state of Serbia.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the wider and longer-lasting cult of Stefan III as a saint among Serbian rulers is rivaled only by that of the Serbian Kingdom's founder, Stefan-Simeon (r. 1169–96). It stands out also because of the cameo played in Dečani's hagiographies by one of the most venerated saints in the East and the West, the great miracle worker, St. Nicholas of Myra (and Bari).

Stefan III's status as the embodiment of the ideals of sainthood and kingship resulted from two areas: first, the actual activities of the sovereign during his life and, second, the shaping of his life story after his death. As to the former, this chapter offers insight into how Stefan III represented himself as a pious sovereign, drawing on his devotion to St. Nicholas, his patronage of churches and works of art, and the body of (scarce) historical sources. As to the latter, I explore the retrospective shaping of his image from the time of his son Stefan IV onward, in both written and depicted hagiographies.<sup>3</sup>

We have two main written sources for information on Stefan III's life. The oldest vita is the near contemporary *Life of the Serbian Kings and Archbishops* written by Danilo II (ca. 1270–1337) with additions by an anonymous follower of his work.<sup>4</sup> The second source is a proper hagiography written by Gregory Tsamblak (1365–1420) around 1400.

These texts agree on the presentation of the events that brought Stefan III to power as quite intricate and mostly ill-fated.

According to Danilo, Stefan III, as an adolescent, was sent as hostage to the Tartar khan Nogay (r. ca. 1250–99).<sup>5</sup> When Stefan returned to Serbia, he was appointed with the title of governor of Zèta and married the Bulgarian princess Teodora in 1296, who bore him two sons, Dušan and Dušica.<sup>6</sup> During the last years of reign, his father, King Milutin, forged a new alliance with the Byzantine Empire, which he reinforced by marrying Andronikos II's (1282–1328) infant daughter, Simonida.<sup>7</sup> In 1314, because of the rumblings of a rebellion in the region of Zèta involving the aristocracy and his own son, Milutin sent Stefan into exile to Constantinople together with his family, where they were hosted in the imperial monastery of Christ Pantokrator, under the protection of Milutin's new ally. After being forgiven, Stefan returned to the governorship of Zèta until his father's death, in 1321. It is necessary to stress that accession to the throne was not guaranteed for Stefan, but he managed to seize power and become king in 1322, while Dušan acquired the title of “young king.”<sup>8</sup> After the death of his beloved wife, Theodora, he married Maria (d. 1355), the daughter of the *panhypersebastor* John Palaeologus (1288/89–1336), the nephew of Emperor Andronikos II and Irene Metochite, the daughter of Theodore (1270–1332), his famous minister of finance. Soon after the emperor died, the alliance created by the marriage faltered after a new attack by Andronikos III (r. 1328–41) and by the Bulgarians between 1329 and 1330.<sup>9</sup> Danilo gives no information on the circumstances of Stefan III's death.<sup>10</sup>

Danilo does give extensive details about Stefan III's building of Dečani Monastery. Following the tradition of his predecessors, Stefan III ordered the construction of a brand new monastery for his burial and dedicated it to Christ Pantokrator ([Figure 17.1](#)).<sup>11</sup> The charter of the monastery, signed by the king, includes a poetic description of the paradisiacal location, a list of precious gifts to the sanctuary, extensive donations of lands to the monastery, and also an autobiographical note. After having introduced his lineage, Stefan first refers to the events of his exile. He states that he was deprived of his sight by his father and then healed thanks to divine intervention.<sup>12</sup> In order to frame the context of the episode, it is worth

recalling that punishment in the form of blinding was a well-established practice meant to exclude an heir to the throne in Byzantine history. Based upon the principle that the representative of God's order on the Earth should be intact, the act of depriving a rival of his sight was an effective means to eliminate competition while avoiding murder.<sup>13</sup> While it is likely that the blinding never really happened, it is notable that Stefan's healing justified his right to succession, providing evidence of the divine approval of his power.





[Figure 17.1](#) [Portrait of Stefan III Uroš as ktetor, mural painting, 1337–50, Dečani, Monastery of Christ Pantokrator.](#)

Source: Blago Fund Inc., 1998–2020.

The entrance lintel of the *katholikon* of Dečani is signed by the Franciscan architect Fra' Vita, providing the chronology of construction (1327–35).<sup>14</sup> Stefan III's son Dušan completed the church's magnificent decoration in the following decade.<sup>15</sup> On the leftmost pillar after entering the bema, Stefan III is represented dressed in a Byzantine imperial robe and presenting the church model to Christ. He is faced, on the opposite pillar, by a full-length portrait of St. Nicholas.<sup>16</sup> The outer two of the church's five aisles housed distinct chapels dedicated to two miracle workers and healer saints: St. Demetrius (the patron saint of Thessaloniki) and St. Nicholas.<sup>17</sup> The chapel of St. Nicholas hosts an extended cycle of the saint's life, consisting of seventeen episodes.<sup>18</sup> Danilo II also mentions another, now-lost church in the monastery dedicated to St. Nicholas, which was connected to the guesthouse and hospital.<sup>19</sup>

### **The Serbian Icon of St. Nicholas in Bari: A Family Portrait**

Dečani's peculiar architectural features cannot not be explained without considering the context of the cultural and political dialogue surrounding the Adriatic shore.<sup>20</sup> The Serbian Kingdom emerged along the ridge

between the Byzantine Empire and the Western forces, switching their allegiance between these sides in order to increase its independence and political influence.<sup>21</sup> As a consequence, Southern Italy was a likely political and ideological reference. The relationship between Serbian rulers and the sanctuary of San Nicola di Bari belongs to this context. The extensive royal gifts to San Nicola di Bari listed in inventories are now lost, with the only impressive exception being the monumental icon donated by Stefan III (Figures 17.2a and 17.2b).<sup>22</sup>

(a)



(b)



*Figure 17.2* (a) Icon of St. Nicholas donated by Stefan III Uroš (with its riza), 1320s, Bari, San Nicola, crypt. (b) Icon of St. Nicholas donated by Stefan III Uroš (without its riza), 1320s, Bari, San Nicola, crypt.

*Sources:* Fototeca dell'Archivio Storico, Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio della città metropolitana di Bari, inv. n. 303383; Fototeca dell'Archivio Storico, Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio della città metropolitana di Bari, inv. n. 307997.

The icon arrived in Bari around 1327 and was housed in the crypt, venerated as the *vera imago* of St. Nicholas and greatly revered.<sup>23</sup> On the occasion of its restoration in 1966, the gilded silver *riza* (revetment) was removed, and it was possible to detect an older layer of painting, together with inscriptions. It appeared that a new revetment forced a redesign of the general imagery of the panel. In the upper section, the sacred figures of Christ and the Virgin were scaled down, St. Nicholas's figure was enlarged with differently positioned hands, and the donor figures were monumentalized. Even though the icon has been traditionally attributed to Milutin's patronage, both the inscriptions and a reexamination of the inventories confirm that the donors, kneeling on the left in the older layer and standing the new one, should be identified with Stefan III Uroš and his son and designated heir, Stefan IV Uroš.<sup>24</sup>

From these preliminary clues, the sovereign's devotion to St. Nicholas does not appear as remarkable in the context of Serbian rulers' patronage. It would be hard to list the thousands of churches dedicated to the saint in the Serbian territories before Stefan's reign, however, some evidence leads us to assume that St. Nicholas was already a major presence in the "dynastic pantheon." Simeon-Stefan Nemanja's first foundation in Kursumlija was dedicated to St. Nicholas, and cycles of his life were already included in several royal foundations.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, the exclusive relationship between Stefan III and St. Nicholas might have been shaped after his death.

### **Later Sources**

A second document signed by the sovereign, whose authenticity has been questioned, is attributed to the time of Stefan III's son, around 1339.<sup>26</sup> It consists of a donation deed to Hilandar Monastery of Mount Athos, with a prayer to St. Nicholas, since the donations include the church of St. Nicholas in Dobruša, rebuilt by Stefan from the ground up. The prayer

honors St. Nicholas's mercy, hinting at private events, particularly the false charge of which Stefan III was accused by his father, Stefan's blinding and exile, and, finally, the miraculous intervention of St. Nicholas that restored his health and led to his rule. The saint is said to have appeared in a vision, "like in a dream," to the king. The set of events, hinted at here, are broadly told in Gregory Tsamblak's work.<sup>27</sup>

The life by Gregory Tsamblak is preserved in several manuscripts, and it was later included in most of the Slavic collections of St. Nicholas's lives.<sup>28</sup> The narration stresses the piety of Stefan III and his innocence of his father's accusations, ascribing the discord between them, not surprisingly, to a woman, namely Milutin's last wife. Stefan III was brutally assaulted and blinded after he was falsely accused of conspiracy. He was then sent into exile in Constantinople. At Ovče Pole, not far from a church dedicated to St. Nicholas, Stefan fell asleep there and had a vision (9.1 - 10). St. Nicholas appeared to Stefan, holding his eyes. The saint told Stefan not to be scared because he was looking after them. Five years passed, spent in prayer and penitence in the Pantokrator Monastery of Constantinople. At the eve of St. Nicholas's feast, during the reading of the life of the great miracle worker, Stefan fell asleep again, and St. Nicholas appeared to him and returned his sense of sight (19.1–20). The miraculous healing was wisely hidden by Stefan, who then returned to Serbia and managed to obtain the throne after Milutin's passing. Tsamblak also includes the third and last apparition of St. Nicholas at Nerodimlje, when the saint warned Stefan of his imminent death (41.1–7). In fact, Stefan died after being exiled and overthrown by Dušan and killed by his hit men. Some years after the death, Stefan's body was placed in a burial in Dečani Monastery, where it caused several miraculous healings. Tsamblak highlights Stefan's welcoming attitude toward his misfortune, presenting him as a martyr in both life and death.<sup>29</sup> Although Nicholas's restoration of Stefan's sight is but one among his many miraculous interventions, the event is significant and extraordinary in a way.<sup>30</sup>

## Further Figural Evidence



Alexandr Naumov investigated a group of manuscripts that contain Tsamblak's vita and include the scenes of St. Nicholas's apparitions to the king.<sup>31</sup> Seven illustrations depict the life of Stefan III in the Bolšakov manuscript of the *Life of Saint Nicholas* (ca. 1560; Moscow, State Russian Library, MS F.37, fund Bolšakov, n. 15) ([Figure 17.3](#)).<sup>32</sup> In the first apparition after the blinding, the prince is shown lying on the ground while St. Nicholas stands and addresses him. The depiction of the restoration of sight follows almost literally the written version. In the background, there is the ritual celebration, while in the foreground, the king is depicted twice before St. Nicholas, representing two moments of the story: first he is blind, prostrating himself before the saint, and then he is healed, standing in gratitude before Nicholas. The last apparition, when the saint announces the king's imminent death, shows Stefan in his bed while St. Nicholas stands and addresses him with the gesture of speech.



[Figure 17.3](#) [St. Nicholas appearing in apparitions to King Stefan III Uroš, from the Bolšakov Life of St. Nicholas, ca. 1560, State Russian Library, Moscow, MS F.37, fund Bolšakov, n. 15, lithographic copy by A. Beggrov, 1870.](#)

Source: Cioffari, *Gli zar di Serbia, la Puglia e S. Nicola*, 121, 137, 156.

The most representative pictorial hagiography of Stefan appears on the vita icon executed and donated by the painter Longinus in 1577, in the treasury from the monastery of Dečani, which depicts the king enthroned, framed on three sides by seventeen episodes of his life (Figure 17.4).<sup>33</sup> The three scenes with Stefan and St. Nicholas are depicted on the left row. The pictorial life begins in the upper-left corner, with Stefan slandered to his father.<sup>34</sup> The first scene on the right row depicts the king being blinded. The second scene in the left row shows the first encounter with the saint after the mutilation. Stefan is lying on his bed, his eyes covered by a blindfold, while St. Nicholas, standing behind the bed, addresses him, leaning forward with his right palm open, displaying the king's eyes.<sup>35</sup> St. Nicholas's second apparition is located in the fourth scene of the left row. In the background is the exterior of a domed church, Stefan is seated, and St. Nicholas faces the king, touching his eyes to restore his sight.<sup>36</sup> The narration continues with the episodes dedicated to Stefan's return to Serbia, his acts of the charity, and the building of Dečani Monastery, in the sixth scene of the left row.<sup>37</sup> The following seventh scene shows the last apparition of St. Nicholas to Stefan III, announcing his martyrdom. The king is lying again on his bed with the saint standing behind it, addressing Stefan with the gesture of speech.<sup>38</sup>





[Figure 17.4 Zograf Longin, Holy King Stefan Uroš, the Third of Dečani, with his hagiography, tempera on panel, 1577, 150 × 93 × 5.5 cm, Belgrade, Museum of the Serbian Orthodox Church.](#)

Source: Museum of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Belgrade.

In the icon's main portrait, Stefan appears holding a scepter topped by a cross, a common attribute in depictions of martyrs. Nevertheless, because of the gesture and because the cross forms part of the imperial garments, Vojislav Djurić suggests that the icon evokes Constantine the Great's

portrait holding the *crux invicta* and that Stefan is thus represented as the “new Constantine.”<sup>39</sup> The large scene of the victorious battle of Velbuzhd (1330), occupying the lower frame, reinforces this visual parallel, echoing the Battle at the Milvian Bridge.

Images can be more direct in delivering messages than texts; however, the rhetorical reference to Constantine was already consciously adopted in literary production. Danilo II compares Stefan II Milutin to Constantine because of his success on battlefields and Stefan III Uroš because of his piety and the divine aid that led him to several victories.<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, Gregory Tsamblak stresses the role of woman in both the ruler's biographies.<sup>41</sup> Stefan III himself seems to have exploited the potential of this rhetorical parallelism. An expansive cycle of the life of Constantine the Great adorned the church dedicated to St. Nicholas in Dabar, restored around 1329 with the joint sponsorship of Stefan and the local bishop.<sup>42</sup> Nancy Patterson Ševčenko stresses that no other saintly ruler had such preeminence in the visual arts and devotion as Constantine the Great save for Stefan III himself.<sup>43</sup>

As for St. Nicholas's role in this context, it is important to keep in mind that even though healing miracles were common in textual sources, they were quite unusual in Byzantine visual narrative cycles of the life of the saint.<sup>44</sup> There was, however, an influential precedent for the iconography of Nicholas's apparitions in images of the dream of Emperor Constantine the Great that were included in images of the *Story of the Three Generals (Praxis de Stratelatis)*. The story tells that, when three generals were falsely accused of conspiracy and imprisoned, they prayed for St. Nicholas's intervention, the saint appeared the same night in a dream to the emperor Constantine asking for the innocents deliverance. Images show Saint Nicholas standing and approaching Constantine fully dressed in imperial garments and sleeping, lying in bed with eyes closed.<sup>45</sup>

The scene is the most frequent one in St. Nicholas's pictorial narratives and thus was familiar to every worshipper in the ecumene.<sup>46</sup> Most of the depictions of Nicholas's apparitions to Stefan III borrow their composition from the famous Constantinian episode, known in both manuscripts and panel paintings.<sup>47</sup> I suggest that more than a mere recycling of the well-known composition, the depiction of Stefan's miraculous healing and his

relationship with St. Nicholas is enhanced by the visual parallel with Constantine the Great. In other words, this iconographic bond constitutes an additional visual means of shaping the ideal image of a saintly sovereign based on the most illustrious model. A later piece of evidence might corroborate this insight. In the chapel of St. Nicholas in the patriarchate of Peć, repainted in 1673–74, the episodes of dream apparitions from the *Praxis de Stratelatis* and those of Stefan III face each other in the bema, despite the logical and chronological sequence of the scenes in the naos ([Figure 17.5](#)).<sup>48</sup>



[Figure 17.5](#) Saint Nicholas appearing to Stefan III, seventeenth century, patriarchate of Peć, chapel of St. Nicholas, bema, south vault.

Source: Blago Fund Inc., 1998–2020.

## Conclusion

The sources collected here suggest that Stefan III employed his miraculous healing from blindness as means to legitimate his power. Conversely, the role of St. Nicholas as the mediator of divine grace in both biography and

image cycles is posthumous and may be attributed to his son, Stefan IV Dušan, who was working in correlation with the promotion of the cult in the monastery of Dečani. Additionally, the legitimacy St. Nicholas granted Stefan III's (and Dušan's) sovereignty could be rhetorically paralleled with Constantine, the ultimate saintly ruler and martyr, to whom the Nemanjići trace their lineage. Constantine the Great constituted a nearly “classical,” if not antiquarian, element of the Byzantine ideology employed by the Nemanjići dynasty. This parallel led to a new image of Stefan III Dečani as the ideal ruler and saint, which made use of his relationship with St. Nicholas as it was shaped by images and texts.

## Notes

1. [For a short biographical note, see \*The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium\* \(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991\), s.v. “Stefan Uroš III,” by Jelisaveta Stanojevich Allen, 3:1950. On Stefan's mother, see note 9.](#)
2. [Smilja Marjanović-Dušanić, \*Sveti kralj: Kult Stefana Dečanskog\* \[The holy king: The cult of St. Stefan of Dečani\] \(Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies, Sp. Ed. 97 & Clio, 2007\), chap. 2; Danica Popović, “A National ‘Pantheon’: Saintly Cults at the Foundation of Serbian Medieval State Church,” in \*Artistic Heritage of the Serbian People in Kosovo and Metohija: History, Identity, Vulnerability Protection\*, eds. Dragan Vojvodić and Miodrag Marković \(Belgrade: Grafostil, 2017\), 119–31; Branislav Cvetković, “The Royal Imagery of Medieval Serbia,” in \*Meanings and Functions of the Ruler's Image in the Mediterranean World \(11th–15th Centuries\)\*, eds. Michele Bacci, Manuela Studer-Karlen, and Mirko Vagnoni \(Leiden: Brill 2022\), 172–218.](#)
3. [Aleksandr Naumow, “O związkach św. Stefana Deczańskiego ze św. Mikołajem” \[Saint Stefan Dečani and Saint Nicholas\] \*Ikonoteka\* 21 \(2008\): 147–64; Aleksandr Naumow, “Святитель Николай и святой Стефан Дечанский” \[St. Nicholas and St. Stefan Dečani\], in \*Добрый кормчий: Почитание святителя Николая в христианском мире\* \[The good helmsman: Veneration of St. Nicholas in the Christian](#)

- World], ed. Aleksandr V. Bugaevskij, (Moscow: СКИНИЯ, 2011), 188–91.
4. Danilo II was a key personality of his time: he was the hegumen of Hilandar Monastery on Mount Athos, the personal counsellor and religious guide of King Milutin, and the tenth archbishop of Serbia (1324–37). See Gordon Lawrence McDaniel, “The ‘Lives of the Serbian Kings and Archbishops’ by Danilo II: Textual History and Criticism” (PhD diss., University of Washington, 1980); Francis J. Thomson, “Archbishop Daniel II of Serbia: Hierarch, Hagiographer, Saint; with Some Comments on the *Vitae Regum et archiepiscoporum Serbiae* and the Cult of Medieval Serbian Saints,” *Analecta Bollandiana* 111 (1993): 103–34.
  5. On the Mongol army's advance, see, with further bibliography, *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, s.v. “Nogay,” by A. Kazhdan, 3:1490.
  6. Theodora was the daughter of the Bulgarian tsar Smilets and Smiltsena Palaiologina, Michael VIII Paleologus's niece. The younger son of the couple died in Constantinople, according to Danilo.
  7. Historical sources point out that, at the time of the marriage with Simonida, the prior wedding with Anna Terter was voided, and the son born from that union was consequently illegitimate. However the identification of Dečani's mother is indeed quite intricate. Apparently, Milutin had at least four marriages before 1298. Milutin's first marriage was with an unknown Serbian noblewoman (who has been identified with Dečani's mother). His second marriage was with the daughter of the sebastokrator of Thessaly, John Angelos, in 1282–83. His third was with the daughter of the Hungarian king Katalina in 1283–84. His fourth marriage, the longest, lasting from 1284 to 1298, was with Anna Terter. See Marjanović-Dušanić, *Sveti kralj*, 205–9.
  8. The reign was, in fact, soon troubled when his cousin and potential rival to the throne, Vladislav, son of Dragutin, threatened the northwest.
  9. On the complicated father-son relationship, see also Boško I. Bojović, *L'idéologie monarchique dans les hagio-biographies dynastiques du Moyen Âge Serbe* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1995), 88–93, 94–96; Donald M. Nicol, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium, 1261–1453*

- (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 176–84, esp. 176.
10. As we will see, there is a different tradition on Stefan's death. Possibly Archbishop Danilo had the role of intercessor securing Milutin's forgiveness, but he was also the cause of Stefan's fall and the rise of his son Dušan, who was crowned by himself. See also Bojović, *Idéologie monarchique*, 182. The imprisonment of the king is also recalled by Nicephoros Gregoras. On Gregoras's embassy to the Serbian court, see Peter Schreiner, “Die Gesandtschaftsreise des Nikephoros Gregoras nach Serbien (1326/27),” *Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta* 38 (1999/2000): 331–42.
  11. Vojislav J. Djurić, ed., *Dečani i vizantijska umetnost sredinom XIV veka* [Dečani and byzantine art at the mid-fourteenth century] (Belgrade: Jedinstvo 1989); Milka Čanak-Medić and Branislav Todić, eds., *The Dečani Monastery*, trans. Ivana Knežević (Novi Sad: Visoki Dečani Monastery and Platoneum, 2017); Ida Sinkević, “Dečani between the Adriatic Littoral and Byzantium,” in *Byzantium in Eastern European Visual Culture in the Late Middle Ages*, eds. Maria Alessia Rossi and Alice Sullivan (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 143–66. On the inscription, see Bradislav Todić, “The History and Antiquities of the Monastery,” in Čanak-Medić and Todić, *Dečani Monastery*, 13–132, at 17, 23.
  12. *Monumenta serbica*, doc. 83; *Прва хрисовуља Манасџира Дечани* [The charter of Dečani monastery], ed. Milica Grković, trans. Randall A. Major (Belgrade: Centar za očuvanje nasleđa Kosova i Metohije, 2004), 86–87; Gerardo Cioffari, *Gli zar di Serbia, la Puglia e S. Nicola: Una storia di santità e violenza* (Bari: Levante editori, 1989), 63; Đorđe Bubalo, “Dva priloga o Dečanskim hrisovuljama” [Two studies on the chrysobulls for Dečani Monastery], *Stari srpski arhiv* 6 (2007): 221–31.
  13. John Lascaratos and Spyros Marketos, “The Penalty of Blinding during Byzantine Times,” *Documenta Ophthalmologica* 81 (1992): 133–44. On the continuity and change of the imperial ideology of integrity in the late Byzantine era, see D. Angelov, *Imperial Ideology and Political Thought in Byzantium, 1204–1330* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 78–115.



14. [Čanak-Medić and Todić, \*Dečani Monastery\*.](#)
15. [The painting decoration likely started around 1337. Moreover, the wooden beam of the chapel of St. George notes the hegumen Arsenije as superintendent for the year 1339 to 1340; Bradislav Todić, “The Frescoes of the Dečani Church,” in Čanak-Medić and Todić, \*Dečani Monastery\*, 325–515, at 325–26.](#)
16. [On Dečani's imperial portraits, see Gordana Babić, “Les portraits de Dečani représentant ensemble Dečanski et Dušan,” in Djurić, \*Dečani i vizantijska umetnost\*, 273–86.](#)
17. [It is necessary to recall that a vast portion of Macedonia had just been integrated into Serbian territories and that Thessaloniki would soon be in dispute and seized by 1334.](#)
18. [See Nancy Patterson Ševčenko, \*The Life of Saint Nicholas in Byzantine Art\* \(Turin: Bottega d’Erasmio, 1983\), 49. The cycle of the life is located on the second half of the chapel, in the upper section of the walls, above the arches and the windows, and on the cross vaults. Because the chapel is rather narrow, the scenes on the lateral walls are hardly perceivable.](#)
19. [Cioffari, \*Gli zar di Serbia\*, 64.](#)
20. [Western influence is evident in the architecture and sculptural decoration. See Sinkević, “Dečani between the Adriatic,” 150–59; Milka Čanak-Medić, “The Sculpture of the Katholikon,” in Čanak-Medić and Todić, \*Dečani Monastery\*, 278–321. See also Valentino Pace and Dubravka Preradović, “Creative Ties to Western European Art,” in \*Artistic Heritage of the Serbian People in Kosovo and Metohija: History, Identity, Vulnerability, Protection\*, eds. Dragan Vojvodić and Miodrag Marković \(Belgrade: Grafostil, 2017\), 185–207.](#)
21. [Among the most significant changes of alliance is the marriage between Stefan the First-Crowned and Anna, daughter of Enrico Dandolo, following the capture of Constantinople by the Latins in 1204—apart from the aforementioned marriages of Milutin.](#)
22. [The first inventory that quotes a gift from Serbian sovereigns dates to August 1326: “Candelabra duo magna de argento ... cum 5 pomis magnis,” which were donated by Milutin; see \*Codice diplomatico barese\*, vol. 16, \*Le pergamene di S. Nicola di Bari: Il periodo angioino \(1309–1343\)\*, ed. Francesco Nitti de Vito \(Trani: Vecchi, 1941\), 125–](#)

- 32, at 129 (no. 72). In the inventory of the year 1362, ten items are attributed to the munificence of Serbian rulers. Among them is the silver altar donated in 1319 by Milutin, carefully described by detailing its intrinsic and esthetic value: “Altare magnum ornatum per totum circum circa argento ... cum ymaginibus sanctorum et desuper tribunal ipsius altaris ornatum est et cohoptum de argento per totum cum ymaginibus dei patris in medio quatuor evangelistarum in figuris luna et stellis. Retro ipsum altare est tabula una que extenditur de una columpna ad aliam que quidem ex (...) cohopta et ornate est de argento per totum cum ymagibus beati Nicolai et sanctorum cum pomis novem de argento deauratis super positis in ipsa tabula” see *Codice diplomatico barese*, vol. 18, *Le pergamene di S. Nicola di Bari: Il periodo angioino (1343–1381)*, ed. Francesco Nitti de Vito (Trani: Vecchi, 1950), 131–70, at 162 (no. 74). For a complete survey of the inventory content, see Cioffari, *Gli zar di Serbia*, 83–85.
23. The arrival of the icon in 1327 can be inferred by the diplomatic correspondence. The duke of Calabria, in the role of intermediary, wrote to the canons of San Nicola di Bari requesting an agent to be sent in Serbia to receive Stefan III's gift; see Vukosava Tomić De Muro, “Srpske ikone u crkvi Sv. Nikole u Bariju” [The Serbian icon in the church of St. Nicholas in Bari], *Zbornik za likovne umetnosti Matica Srpska* 2 (1966): 107–24; Cioffari, *Gli zar di Serbia*, 99–112; Bojan Miljković, “Nemanjići i sveti Nikola u Bariju” [The Nemanjići and Saint Nicholas of Bari], *Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta* 44, no. 1 (2007): 276–94.
24. Svetozar Radojčić, *Staro srpsko slikarstvo* [Ancient Serbian painting] (Belgrade: Akademska knjiga, 1966); Pavle Mijović, “Carska ikonografija u srpskoj srednjevekovnoj umetnosti” [Imperial iconography in Serbian medieval art], *Starinar* 18 (1967): 103–18; Maria Stella Calò Mariani, “San Nicola nell’arte in Puglia tra XIII e XVIII secolo,” in *San Nicola di Bari e la sua basilica: Culto, arte e tradizione*, ed. Giorgio Otranto (Milan: Electa, 1987), 98–137, at 105; Cioffari, *Gli zar di Serbia*, 110. Among Stefan III's gifts, there are several luxurious sumptuary items and precious fabrics, including a *Tellella*, a small textile, embroidered with gold and adorned with

- aniconic decor, which accompanied the icon, possibly a *podea*. See *Codice diplomatico barese*, 18:142.
25. The oldest St. Nicholas life cycle in Serbia is in Studenica (1227–33), of which only one scene survives; see Milan Kašanin, Vojislav Korać, Dušan Tasić, and Mariana Šakota, *Studenica* (Belgrade: Književne novine, 1968), 88; Anthony Eastmond, “‘Local’ Saints and Regional Identities in the Orthodox World after the Fourth Crusade,” *Speculum* 78 (2003): 707–49, at 709. The cycle in Gračanica Monastery's St. Nicholas's Chapel (1321) consists of eight preserved scenes; see: Desanka Milosević and Živojin Rakočević, *Gračanica Monastery*, trans. Alice Copple-Tošić and Marija Stanojev (Gračanica: Gračanica Monastery, 2015).
  26. The text is edited in *Monumenta serbica*, 92, 109–11; S. Mišić, “Povelja kralja Stefana Uroša III manastiru Svetog Nikole Mračkog u Orehovu” [The charter of King Stefan Uroš III to the monastery of St. Nicholas in Orehovo], *Stari Srpski Archiv* 1 (2002): 56–59. For the dating and the authorship, Smilja Marjanović-Dušanić, “O pitanju autentičnosti povelja mračkog kompleksa” [On the authenticity of the charter of Mraka complex], *Stari Srpski Archiv* 3 (2004): 153–68; Cioffari, *Gli zar di Serbia*, 64.
  27. This point may also help attribute the document to Dušan.
  28. On the tradition of Stefan's life by Tsamblak, see Naumow, “O związkach św. Stefana”; Naumow, “Святитель Николай,” 188–90. For an Italian translation based on the Rumjancev manuscript (Moscow, Russian State Library, MS397, fol. 256), see Cioffari, *Gli zar di Serbia*, 119–65. Original Slavic text is published in: Давидов, Данчев, Дончева-Панайотова, Ковачев, Генчева, Русев, *Житие на Стефан Дечански от Григорий Цамблак* [Life of Stefan Dečani by Gregory Tsamblak], (Sofia: BAN, 1983).
  29. On the importance of martyrs in Serbian ideology, see Smilja Marjanović-Dušanić, “Patterns of Martyrial Sanctity in the Royal Ideology of Medieval Serbia: Continuity and Change,” *Balkanica* 37 (2006): 69–81.
  30. Many contemporary miracles enriched Nicholas's hagiography during the Middle Ages, such as a significant group of miracles concerning sea rescues and liberations from hostages that appeared in the ninth

- century. Those narrations, besides permanently linking St. Nicholas with the sea, might be seen as a consequence of the contemporary political asset of the southern coast of the Mediterranean Sea. On this topic, see Michele Bacci, *San Nicola: Il grande taumaturgo* (Bari: Laterza, 2009), 58–61. Closer in time and in subject, halfway between historical account and hagiography, is the healing of John Orphanotrophos in 1034; for further bibliography, see Irene Caracciolo, “John Orphanotrophos and Saint Nicholas: A Special Relationship? Some Observations in Light of Figural Evidences,” *Diogenes* 10 (2021): 5–18.
31. The most extensive cycle of the life of Stefan, illustrated by thirty-one scenes, is included in the manuscript named after the former owner, the count Ostermann, by ca. 1576, containing the Russian chronicle written in the 1530s, Лицевой летописный свод (Obverse Chronicle); see Naumow, “O związkach św. Stefana”; Naumow, “Святитель Николай.”
  32. The popularity of the illuminations is due to the copy printed by Beggov (1870s); see Gerardo Cioffari, “Vita di San Nicola il Taumaturgo (Žitije Nikolaja Čudotvorca),” in *San Nicola: Splendori d’arte d’Oriente e d’Occidente*, ed. Michele Bacci (Milan: Skira, 2006), 257, (no. IV.1); Elena I. Serebrjakova, “Образ Николая Чуудотврца в минятюрах русских рукописей” [The image of Saint Nicholas Thaumaturgos in the medieval Russian book miniature], in *Vugaevskij, Добрый кормчий*, 426–45.
  33. Lazar Mirković, “Ikone manastira Dečana” [Icons of Dečani Monastery], *Starine Kosova I Metohije* 2/3 (1963): 17–19; Vojislav J. Djurić, “Icône du saint Roi Stefan Uroš III avec des scènes de sa vie: Contribution à la compréhension des conceptions littéraires et théologiques d’un zographe du XVIe siècle,” *Balkan Studies* 24, no. 2 (1983): 373–401, at 374–75. In the lower right, the signature of the painter forwarded by prayer to the saint is still preserved (*ibid.*, 377). On the original relationship between the icon and Stefan's relics, see Branislav Todić, “The Iconostasis in Dečani: The Original Painted Programme and Subsequent Changes,” *Zograf* 36 (2012): 115–29; Miljana Matić, ed., *Serbian Icon Painting in the Territory of the*

*Renewed Patriarchate of Peć, 1557–1690* (Belgrade: Skener studio Lazić, 2016).

34. [The story sequence follows Gregory Tsamblak, from which some of the inscriptions are taken, with marginal variations. The whole bottom frame depicts the battle of Velzbud, possibly from the liturgical office; see Djurić, “Icône du saint Roi Stefan,” 386, 396.](#)
35. [The inscription reads, “Saint Nicholas appears to the saint at Ovče Pole,” see \*ibid.\*, 387.](#) The author does not describe the additional figures in the room, which likely depict Stefan's family members. The following scenes display the exile, a council in Constantinople, and the journey to Rome. These episodes are unknown in Tsamblak's life, but they underline the king's Orthodoxy and his engagement in the fight against heresies; [ibid.](#), 388–89.
36. [The inscription reads, “The sight restored,” followed by a prayer that alludes to the spiritual vision gained by the king before his actual sight was restored; \*ibid.\*, 389.](#) The episode of the healing is found at the foot of the enthroned St. Nicholas depicted in an icon kept in the church of St. Tryphon in the village of Veliča Hoča dated around the fifteenth century. St. Nicholas touches the blindfolded eyes of the king. The scene bears inscriptions and is preceded on the left by the figure of a donor carrying a scroll with a long prayer to the saint.
37. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, 390–91.](#)
38. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, 392.](#)
39. [In a similar way, the scene depicting the coronation of the king by an angel also refers to the Byzantine conception of the divine descendance of power; \*ibid.\*, 379–80.](#)
40. [Aleksander Naumow, “Costantino il Grande nella letteratura serba antica,” in \*La figura di Costantino imperatore e ideologia imperiale nella storia culturale, religiosa, civile dei Paesi slavi\*, eds. Francesco Braschi and Maria Di Salvo \(Milan: Biblioteca Ambrosiana, 2013\), 113–32, at 118.](#)
41. [Note: \*Ibid.\*](#) Respectively, Milutin's wife and Constantine's wife, Fausta, caused the murder of the son of the emperor Crispus.
42. [The fourteenth-century decoration has been repainted in the sixteenth century following the former iconography; see Svetoslav Radojčić, “Freska Konstantinove pobede u crkvi Sv. Nikole Dabarskog” \[The](#)

- fresco of Constantine's victory in the church of St. Nicholas in Dabarski], *Glasnik Skopskog naučnog društva* 19 (1938): 87–102.
43. Ševčenko, “Vita Icon,” 156. However, Saint Simeon Nemanja's life cycle also appears in Serbian painting decoration; see Eastmond, “Local’ Saints and Regional Identities,” 708–17.
  44. The canonical cycle of the life of St. Nicholas, established in the later twelfth century, includes: his birth, his schooling, his consecration (one or more scenes), the episodes of the miracle of the three generals (or *Praxis de Stratelatis*), and his death. To this core, several miracles are added, such as the sea rescues, the dowry to the three daughters, the miracle of Basilius rescued from the Saracens of Crete; see Ševčenko, *Life of Saint Nicholas*. Healing scenes represent exceptions in this panorama. The first is constituted by the healing scenes in the cycle in Myra (early twelfth century), which is so unique that it cannot be considered a model. Another possible scene is a fragment of a triptych from Sinai (end of the eleventh century); see Kurt Weitzmann, “Fragments of an Early Triptych of Saint Nicholas from Sinai,” *Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας* 11 (1982–83): 11–23. Finally an episode from St. Nicholas's youth is depicted in Epidauros Limira (half of the thirteenth century); see Nikolaos V. Drandakis, Sofia Kalopissi, and Maria Panayotidi, “Έρευνα στην Έπιδαυρο Λιμιρά,” in *Πρακτικά της Έν Αθήναις Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας*, 139/A (1983): 209–63. On St. Nicholas's post-Byzantine iconography, see Maria Vassilaki, “Святой Николай в поствнзантійской иконописи крнтская школа” [Saint Nicholas in post-Byzantine icon painting], in Bugaevskij, *Добриѹ кормчиѹ*, 418–25.
  45. In the Vita Icon from Sinai the Emperor is shown with eyes open, see: Ševčenko, *Life of Saint Nicholas*, 115–19.
  46. Ševčenko, *Life of Saint Nicholas*, 115–19.
  47. See also Vassilaki, “Святой Николай,” 418–25.
  48. The chapel was built in 1337, after Dečani's death, at the time of Archbishop Danilo II, who was also responsible for the building of two churches dedicated to St. Demetrius and the Virgin (ca. 1320). The frescoes are attributed to the painter Radul but there is no hint whether the early decoration could also have included a cycle of St. Nicholas.

18

EASTERN ROMAN AND  
BULGARIAN PERCEPTIONS OF  
EACH OTHER IN THE  
THIRTEENTH CENTURY

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In the wake of the sack of Constantinople by the Western Crusaders in 1204, the East Roman world entered a new period of its history, one marked by multiple foreign players and a complex geopolitical map. Among these outside groups, particular focus has been placed on these Western groups and their relationship with the indigenous Eastern Romans, from both a political and cultural perspective.<sup>1</sup> The large corpus of extant sources written by Western European authors from the period, as well as the significant place that the Western invaders had in the accounts of East Romans, explains this focus from modern historians. My attention in this chapter, however, is on another prominent ethnic group from the period that

had a large impact on the shaping of the political landscape in the post-1204 East Roman world: the Bulgarians.

In Western historiography, East Roman-Bulgarian relations during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries have received little attention, with most of the discussion occurring in larger works on the political history of the time or in studies on individual authors, such as Niketas Choniates (ca. 1155–1217), George Akropolites (1217–82), and Theodore II Laskaris (1221–58). More attention has been given by Romanian and Bulgarian modern scholars on the subject, but their works remain more obscure in the West due to a lack of circulation and, of course, the language barrier (many important works remain untranslated into major Western languages).<sup>2</sup> The purpose, then, of my chapter is to provide an introduction to how East Romans perceived their Bulgarian contemporaries and how Bulgarian writers perceived Byzantium, with the overall aim to spark further discussions on the topic and provide a framework for more nuanced conversations. The period under focus is between 1204 and 1261, a time when Constantinople was under Latin suzerainty, and there was an increase in cross-cultural interactions throughout the Eastern Mediterranean as multiple ethnic groups vied for control of various territories. Warfare and diplomacy alternated quickly during this period, and the former regions of the East Roman Empire were partitioned out to various invaders who were put into contact with each other in times of both peace and violence.<sup>3</sup> Having rebelled against East Roman rule starting in 1185, the Bulgarians were one of these groups, and the tsars of the Second Bulgarian Empire (1185–1396) took advantage of the chaotic situation in southeast Europe to increase their territorial possessions and sociopolitical prominence on the international stage.

One of the major themes from this period is the focus of contemporary authors on communal identity. In this chapter, I stress how communal identity was constructed and reflected in the written sources from the East Roman and the Second Bulgarian Empires and how each group used the other to emphasize their internal identity markers. From the East Roman perspective, I argue that such authors as Niketas, Akropolites, and Theodore II Laskaris emphasized their Roman identities by casting the Bulgarians as outsiders and barbarians. They wrote of a dichotomy between themselves



and those they viewed as religiously and culturally inferior; the Bulgarians, as barbarians, were an inverse of the Romans. Certain exceptions did occur, especially with regards to specific tsars, but this was more of a reflection of the individual author and the geopolitical circumstances they wrote in. From the Bulgarian perspective, their communal identity focused on their collective historical past with particular attention paid to the period when they were under East Roman rule. Although they looked to Byzantium as a model politically and culturally, the sources under focus in this chapter translated specific East Roman elements into their own Bulgarian context and viewed the East Roman Empire as their equal. For the Bulgarian authors, their own tsars were never inferior to the East Roman emperors, but instead had the potential to rule in Constantinople themselves. Their peculiar position as an outpost of East Roman rule was thus transmitted into their writings, and previous contacts with Byzantium influenced how they perceived of both themselves and the Romans from the East.

The three East Roman authors I examine in this chapter—Niketas, Akropolites, and Theodore II Laskaris—span the entire period in question while providing a fairly consistent perspective of the Bulgarians from the East Roman viewpoint. In contrast, the Bulgarian sources are less extensive and detailed but more varied with regards to type, ranging from apocalyptic texts to inscriptions and hagiographical accounts. Yet, they still provide a glimpse into how Bulgarians viewed both themselves and the Eastern Romans and how their communal identity developed in the thirteenth century.

A brief note on terminology seems appropriate for a discussion such as this. I have chosen to use the label “East Roman” and “East Roman Empire” to refer to those authors from the Byzantine Empire, aligning with recent scholarship that has convincingly argued for the Roman aspect of the title.<sup>4</sup> Members of what modern scholars refer to as Byzantium identified themselves as Romans, a conscious decision to connect themselves and their empire to the ancient citizens of Rome and its imperial ideology and culture. To distinguish them from the Romans based out of Rome, the modifier of “East” seems fitting. From the East Roman perspective then, “barbarian” denotes those individuals who were outside of the East Roman Empire and who they considered not as Roman. The label “barbarian”

could thus be applied to many groups, including the Latins, Scythians, Cumans, and Muslims. It is also important to briefly define “ethnicity.” My understanding is largely derived from the works of Anthony Smith, who provides a list of markers for ethnicity: a collective name, a common myth of descent, a shared history, a distinctive shared culture (displayed through language, religion, customs, institutions, law, architecture, dress, food, music, or art), an association with a specific territory, and a sense of solidarity (at times in opposition to other ethnic groups).<sup>5</sup>

### **East Roman Perceptions of Bulgarians**

From the perspective of East Roman authors, Bulgaria was a unique anomaly in their categorization of outsiders. The Bulgarians were converted to Orthodoxy in the 860s and so shared the same religious affiliation as the East Romans. Ethnically, however, they were distinct and were never considered Roman. As noted by Gill Page, as soon as the Bulgarians converted to Orthodox Christianity, they “entered a shadowy zone that was ideologically neither fully Roman nor fully barbarian.”<sup>6</sup> Politically as well, East Roman authors before 1204 considered Bulgaria to be under Byzantium's hegemony, regardless if the former were actually independent, such as in the period before Basil II (r. 976–1025). Bulgarian attacks on the empire were often classed as revolts in this case.<sup>7</sup> Although discussion of pre-1204 East Roman perceptions of Bulgaria are outside the scope of this paper, it is significant to note that the authors discussed in the following drew from an already established ethnographic perspective of non-Romans or outsiders.<sup>8</sup>

Niketas is our best source for the Vlach-Bulgar rebellion of 1185–86. The conflict arose due to an arbitrary tax increase by the emperor Isaac II Angelos (r. 1185–95), who, according to Niketas, levied a hefty tax mainly on the communities in Anchialus and the Haimos Mountains in order to pay for the celebration of his marriage to the daughter of the Hungarian king Béla III (r. 1172–96).<sup>9</sup> In reaction, the Vlachs sent two of their leaders, the brothers Peter and Asen, to reach a mutual agreement with the emperor. The brothers requested an imperial estate in the region of the Haimos in order to produce more revenue, but this request was denied. With assistance from

the Bulgarians in the area, open revolt ensued shortly afterward and escalated throughout the year 1186.<sup>10</sup> As Paul Stephenson argues in his discussion of the rebellion, Peter and Asen “saw the possibility of a permanent settlement free from Byzantine interference or suzerainty,” with the chance to establish themselves as independent rulers of an independent state.<sup>11</sup> The result of the uprising and the unsuccessful East Roman attempt to stop its spread was the creation of what modern scholars refer to as the Second Bulgarian Empire. Tsar Kalojan (r. 1197–1207), who took over as sole ruler of the Bulgarians’ realm after Peter’s death in 1197, was formally recognized by Pope Innocent III in late 1204 as King of the Bulgarians and Vlachs and the ruler of an independent region.

In his account of the rebellion, Niketas refers to the Vlachs and Bulgarians in a similar fashion to East Roman authors before him. He describes the two groups multiple times as “barbarians” and called the uprising an “evil” and a “disease.” In relating the brothers’ construction of a house of prayer dedicated to St. Demetrios, Niketas portrays Peter, Asen, and their Vlach/Bulgarian brethren as demons, noting that “in it [the house of prayer] they gathered many demoniacs of both races.”<sup>12</sup> The Vlachs and Bulgarians were uncivilized and overtaken by the Devil, having “crossed and bloodshot eyes, hair dishevelled, and with precisely all the other symptoms demonstrated by those possessed by demons.”<sup>13</sup> There was a clear distinction between the East Romans and the Bulgarians in his recounting of the rebellion, with the former representing civilization and the latter wild barbarism.

Niketas also points to the uncivilized characteristic of the Bulgarian land, highlighting its ruggedness and inhospitality. He writes of the “harshness” of the Mount Haimos region and the placement of Vlach/Bulgarian fortresses above cliff faces, noting that the “emperor was hindered by the vast wilderness from making his way through Mysia,” with the mountains protected by barbarians.<sup>14</sup> Niketas goes even further by emphasizing the impiousness of the rebels, claiming that the God of the Bulgars and Vlachs had agreed to their independence and “assented that they should shake off after so long a time the yoke from their neck.”<sup>15</sup> Loyal to the Constantinopolitan imperial regime, the rebellious actions of the Vlachs and Bulgars influenced how Niketas portrayed them. Even though they were

Orthodox Christians, they are depicted in a similar way close to pagans in the account, with their barbarity emphasized.

Niketas portrays John Asen I and Kalojan individually in a similar way by. He refers to Asen I as a violent barbarian, while stressing Kalojan's savageness. In one episode involving John Asen I and a captive priest, Niketas relays that when the priest begged the Bulgarian ruler to release him, Asen I “[threw] his head back in denial, refused and said that it had never been his policy to set Romans free but to kill them.”<sup>16</sup> With regards to Kalojan, he ignored the “solemnity of the day” when besieging Varna (23 March 1201) and was driven by “bloodthirsty demons” when he commanded that the captured inhabitants of the town be thrown into a moat and be buried alive.<sup>17</sup> The violent nature of Kalojan is a popular characteristic emphasized by Niketas that reoccurs several times throughout his work. During Kalojan's siege of Philippopolis, Niketas relates that the Bulgarian tsar plundered the city and “razed it to the ground and condemned many of the inhabitants to be cut down by the sword.” Kalojan is portrayed in the account as overcome by violent revenge after learning that the inhabitants of the city initially refused to submit to him and acknowledge him as emperor. According to Niketas, Kalojan's “savage spirit” increased even further when the city's populace made Alexios Aspietes their ruler. The peacefulness of the Latins is even contrasted to the barbarity of the Bulgarian tsar when Niketas quips that Philippopolis would have “remained unscathed had she conducted her own affairs by peacefully submitting to the Latins and by not opposing Ioanitsa [Kalojan] the Mysian in any way.” For Niketas, then, who viewed the Latins in other sections of his history with contempt, the Bulgarian Kalojan was far more barbaric. Comparing the fate of Philippopolis to Constantinople like a child to her mother, Niketas exclaims that the former was “exposed to the worst evils, given over to pillage and the edge of the sword, pulled down and leveled with the ground, a conspicuous ruin.” Kalojan's barbarity is further emphasized in the fate of Aspietes, who was hung by his feet and nailed to a stake by his ankles, and in Mysia, where he subjected the “rebels to harsh punishments and novel methods of execution” and was described as having a “wrathful and murderous look and hateful aspect.”<sup>18</sup> Niketas highlights multiple times the uncivilized characteristics of John Asen I and Kalojan,

these leaders of a rebellious Bulgarian state, demonstrating the contrast between the civilized East Romans and the Bulgarian rebels.

Akropolites portrays the Bulgarians in an equally negative light as Niketas, although with one notable exception. One of the main purposes of Akropolites's *History* was to support and proselytize the hegemony of the Empire of Nicaea in the geopolitical East Roman world of the thirteenth century. Lines were drawn, ethnically and politically, between the East Romans of Nicaea and all other groups in the region, including the Latins, the Bulgarians, and the rulers of the Despotate of Epiros.<sup>19</sup> Akropolites notes two main characteristics of the Bulgarians: their disdain for the Romans and their lack of military capability. When describing the rebellion of 1185–86, Akropolites reminds his readers of the Bulgarians' past conflicts with the East Romans and the "enslavements, conquests of cities and countless other terrible things" that accompanied them.<sup>20</sup> Later in this same section, when narrating Isaac II Angelos's campaign against the Bulgarians and Vlachs in 1190/91, Akropolites employs another trope: that of the cunning enemy. The emperor was tricked by a Bulgarian who pretended to be a deserter and who informed him of an impending attack from the Scyths, all the while actually leading him into a Bulgarian ambush.<sup>21</sup> Incapable of matching the East Romans in traditional warfare, Akropolites stresses that the Bulgarians resorted to trickery. In his account of the battle of Adrianople from 1205 between the Bulgarians and Latins, Akropolites again emphasizes the lack of military capability of the former, writing that the Bulgarians "are completely without ability in siegecraft, for they know neither how to set up siege engines nor can they devise any other means of making an assault."<sup>22</sup> For Akropolites, then, one aspect of barbarity that distinguished the Bulgarians from the East Romans was the former's primitiveness in their military tactics and weaponry. These descriptions were all meant to discredit the Bulgarians as a formidable force in the Eastern Mediterranean against Nicaea.

The Bulgarian tsar John Asen II (r. 1218–41) receives a lot of attention from Akropolites and is presented in dichotic terms. In his account of the battle of Adrianople, for example, Akropolites notes that the Bulgarian tsar was "not able to fight the Latins in the open" and thus needed to defeat them through strategy.<sup>23</sup> He refers to Asen II in this chapter both as a

barbarian and as “emperor of the Bulgarians,” while also writing that Asen relished in the death of Romans and took part in “bestial” habits due to his kinship ties with the “Scythian race.”<sup>24</sup> On the one hand, Akropolites recognizes the independence of Asen II and the Bulgarians by using the title “emperor,” but he still painted the tsar as a barbarian due to his connection with a traditional barbaric group, the Scythians. Ruth Macrides argues that Akropolites's contradictory portrayal of Asen II stemmed from the tsar's 1234 treaty with the Nicaean emperor John III Vatatzes (r. 1222–54) and the subsequent marriage between Asen II's daughter Helen and the heir to the throne of Nicaea, Theodore II Laskaris (r. 1254–58).<sup>25</sup> As both an ally to the Nicaean cause and a barbarian who could not be trusted (Asen II did break off his treaty briefly in 1237), Asen II is a complicated figure in Akropolites's narrative.

In his recounting of the battle of Klokochnitsa in 1230 between John Asen II and the Epirot ruler Theodore Komnenos Doukas (r. 1215–30), Akropolites paints a different picture of the tsar's martial capabilities. He emphasizes the military prowess of Asen II and the Bulgarians in contrast to Theodore's arrogance and his forces' lack of discipline. Highlighting the much larger army of Romans and Italians (most likely soldiers sent by Frederick II Hohenstaufen) compared to Asen's “small auxiliary force of Scyths, not a thousand in number,” Akropolites writes that the latter “conducted himself most boldly in the battle” and soundly defeated Theodore.<sup>26</sup> In contrast to Niketas's portrayal of Kalojan, Akropolites is struck by Asen II's mercifulness, noting that he was “rather more compassionately disposed towards the captured masses,” freeing most of the army and common people. He qualifies this description, though, by stating that Asen acted compassionately only for his own interests, as he wanted to rule over the citizens of Thrace and Macedonia. At the end of this chapter, Akropolites notes that Asen “seemed to everyone then to be both admirable and blessed. For he did not use the sword on his own people, nor was he defiled by the deaths of Romans, as were the rulers of the Bulgarians before him. Therefore, he was regarded with affection not only by Bulgarians but also by Romans and other nations.”<sup>27</sup> This description of Asen II is a rare exception in the East Roman historiography with regards to

describing the Bulgarians, and it was most likely influenced by the political and marital relations of John III Vatatzes and John Asen II.

John Asen II's withdrawal from the treaty he had made with John III Vatatzes highlights, however, how Akropolites's portrayal of the Bulgarian tsar varied depending on the political circumstances. John Asen II is showcased as a perjurer and violent ruler in this section of the *History*. In the narrative, Asen II wished to revoke his treaty with the Nicaean emperor and break off the marriage between his daughter Helen and Theodore II Laskaris. To bring his daughter home, he sent ambassadors to Vatatzes and his wife, Eirene, requesting to see Helen and “give her a paternal embrace, perform the customary duties and send her back to her father-in-law and her husband again.” Although Vatatzes and Eirene were aware of the scheme, they still sent Helen to Asen II with a warning of the consequences should he break the treaty. Akropolites's description of Asen II taking Helen back to Turnovo includes a statement that the Bulgarian tsar “took her and sat her in front of him on his saddle, hitting her on the temples with his fingers and threatening her violently that if she did not conduct herself quietly, he would do to her whatever he wished,” highlighting the cruel and vicious nature of the tsar.<sup>28</sup>

Finally, Akropolites's description of Michael Asen's campaign against the Empire of Nicaea in late 1254 notes, “For the inhabitants, being Bulgarians, sided with those of the same race, shaking off the yoke of those who spoke another language. For they knew that most of the western parts were inhabited by Bulgarians, rebellious of old against the Romans, recently subdued by the emperor John and not yet inured to the conquest; they always nurture hatred for the Romans.”<sup>29</sup> In this account, Akropolites highlights the ethnic difference between the Bulgarians and East Romans through their languages, as well as acknowledging the past political hegemony of Byzantium over Bulgaria. He is aware, then, of the past subjugation (both from the distant and recent past) of the Bulgarians by the East Romans, while noting their rebellious tendencies.

The final author under study here is the East Roman emperor Theodore II Laskaris, whose letters from his Bulgarian campaign in 1255 shed much light on how he perceived his enemy. Dimiter Angelov has examined these letters in some detail already with regard to their Bulgarian context, but it is

worth mentioning some of the most relevant content here.<sup>30</sup> Considering that the emperor wrote the letters concerning the Bulgarians while on campaign against them, it is only natural that Theodore II would paint them in a negative light. He called them “barbarians” and “Bulgarian dogs,” commenting that they released a “poisonous spirit” that made his soldiers feel cold during the winter and “suffer unbearable heat in the summer.”<sup>31</sup> Theodore II drew a far more distinct line between the civilized East Romans and wild/uncivilized Bulgarians than Niketas and Akropolites, a comparison that also applies to the Bulgarian lands. In similar fashion to Niketas, Theodore II highlights the untamed and uncultivated wilderness of the Bulgarian regions. He describes the plains of eastern Thrace as mountainous, and he writes that the Bulgarians “twist [their bodies] under the hollow precipices full of ravines of [their] places, concealing [their] heads or [their] entire self in the orifices of rocks and dugouts.”<sup>32</sup> In letter 204, Theodore notes that the Bulgarians are arrogant “due to their residence in the mountains,”<sup>33</sup> and in another letter he praises John III Vatatzes for transforming the “impassable mountains of their land [Bulgarians’] passable.”<sup>34</sup> As noted by Dimiter Angelov, Theodore II portrayed the Bulgarian lands as foreign and exotic, casting them as the opposite of Anatolia. Although the emperor had not traveled very far, he paints the areas where he campaigned against the Bulgarians as vast landscapes of unforgiving heat and “Bulgarian barbarity,” entirely void of the luxuries and fruitfulness of Theodore II's homeland.<sup>35</sup>

Similar to Akropolites, Theodore II also acknowledges the past subjugation of Bulgaria by the East Romans. In fact, this hegemony is his primary focus, reflecting the political context in which the letters are written: Theodore II was at the time on a campaign of reconquest in response to Michael Asen's military gains of late 1254. In his encomium to John III Vatatzes, for example, Theodore II rhetorically asks: “Why do you not call to their attention the memory of their slavery in former times, the fulfillment of Roman loyalty on their part, and their servile subjection and humiliation, or did you close the matter by leaving the headless people autonomous and autocephalous?”<sup>36</sup> Later, he highlights John III Vatatzes's subjugation of Michael Asen, writing that Vatatzes conquered the Bulgarians to such an extent that “they cannot send an embassy unless by



the wish, word, law, ordinance, and order” of the former Nicaean ruler.<sup>37</sup> The emperor called Michael Asen “a perjurer” and an imitator of the Antichrist. This portrayal most likely stemmed from Michael Asen's slow disregard for stipulations of a treaty signed between John III Vatatzes and Michael, along with his mother, the regent Eirene. In sum, Theodore II's perception of the Bulgarians was influenced significantly by the political circumstances of the period but continued a tradition of viewing them as foreigners and barbarians.

### **Bulgarian Perceptions of East Romans**

Compared to our East Roman sources, the perspective from Bulgaria itself is more limited. The sources are not as extensive but still offer a glance into how Bulgarian authors viewed their East Roman counterparts and highlighted their own communal identity. One of the most common designations for the East Romans was “Greeks,” instead of *Romaioi*, with the emperors called “tsars.”<sup>38</sup> These designations have a long tradition in the Bulgarian historical record. In the stone annals of the ruler Malamir (r. 831–36), dating from 836, mention is made of the thirty-year peace concluded between Malamir's father, Omurtag, and the East Romans. Omurtag (r. 814–31) “lived well with the Greeks,” but the Bulgarian lands were soon in turmoil when northern Thrace was invaded by the emperor Theophilos (r. 829–42) in 836.<sup>39</sup> The inscription relayed that Malamir “took the field against the Greeks with his army” and “devastated the lands of the Greeks.”<sup>40</sup> Another inscription of Tsar Ivan Vladislav (r. 1015–18), located in Bitolja and dated to 1016, mentions the “Greek army of Tsar Basil,” referencing Emperor Basil II (r. 976–1025).<sup>41</sup> The *Bulgarian Apocryphal Annals* from the eleventh century note the rule of Tsar Peter, who was tsar of the Bulgarians *and* the Greeks, as well as the reign of Constantine Porphyrogenetos (r. 913–59), who was tsar of the Romans. The *Apocryphal Annals* is unique in distinguishing between Bulgarians, Greeks, and Romans, with Romans often described as those who followed the rule of Tsar Constantine (namely Constantine the Great).<sup>42</sup> It appears that “Greeks” in the context of the *Annals* represented Greek-speaking populations under the tsar's reign while the “Romans” were those of the East Roman Empire.

There are many examples of this use of the term 'Greek' from the period under focus in this chapter. In the inscription carved in the church of Forty Martyrs in Turnovo, John Asen II's victory over the "Greek army" is celebrated, while his official seal designates him as "tsar of Bulgarians and Greeks."<sup>43</sup> The inscription in the church of Forty Martyrs is carved on the middle column located at the northern side of the church, commemorating John Asen II's victory over Theodore Doukas Komnenos on 9 March 1230 at the battle of Klokotnitsa. In it, Asen II brags that he "routed the Greek army and captured Tsar Theodore Comnenus himself and all of his *bolijars*." The Bulgarian tsar was thus well aware of his new political prominence after the battle, making him ruler over large tracts of Bulgarian and Greek territories in Thrace and Macedonia. The inscription also mentions the East Romans in Bulgarian terms with the use of the words "tsar" and "bolijars" (the highest class of the Bulgarian feudal aristocracy) to refer to the Epirot ruler and his nobles.<sup>44</sup> In his letter to Pope Innocent III from May 1203, Tsar Kalojan refers to himself as "emperor of the Bulgarians" and calls the East Romans "Greeks" when informing the pope that he refuses their overtures to join the Orthodox Church, although this Bulgarian union with the papacy did not fully interrupt the cultural bonds between the Second Bulgarian Empire and Byzantium nor mean they abandoned Orthodoxy.<sup>45</sup> In the Bulgarian addition to the *Synodikon in the Orthodoxy Sunday* (known modernly as the *Synodikon of Tsar Borili*) from 1211, the Nicaean emperor John III Vatatzes is described as the "pious Greek Tsar Kaloyan Ducas" and, more generally, as the "Greek tsar" or the "eastern Tsar Kaloyan."<sup>46</sup> The use of "eastern Tsar" implies that Kalojan was the "western tsar," equal in standing to the East Roman ruler in Nicaea.<sup>47</sup> In the *translatio* of the relics of St. Ilarion, dated to the thirteenth century, Kalojan is said to have conquered the land of the Greeks, which included Thrace, Macedonia, and Nea Hellas (namely, Greece proper). The same text also states that John Asen II "reigned and held power over the Bulgarians, the Greeks, and the Franks and even over the Serbians and the Albanians."<sup>48</sup> The life of St. John of Rila, written by the Patriarch Euthymius and dating to the second half of the fourteenth century, references the Greek Tsar Lord Andronik (Andronikos I Palaiologos, r. 1183–85) and the conquering of "Greek land" by the Hungarian king and

his soldiers.<sup>49</sup> In the life of St. John from Dragan's Minei, John Asen I is described as wanting to “compete with the ancient tsars, that is, Tsar Constantine and Tsar Peter,” referring to Constantine the Great and the Bulgarian ruler Peter (r. 927–70).<sup>50</sup> Lastly, in the historical account of the translation of the relics of St. Petka from Kalikratia to Turnovo, dating from around the 1230s, the Byzantine Roman emperor Roman III Argiros (r. 1028–34) or Roman IV Diogenes (r. 1068–71) is called the “Tsar Roman,” while the author also notes the “other Orthodox [tsars] who reigned in Constantinople.”<sup>51</sup>

The diverse examples earlier show that thirteenth-century Bulgarian authors were aware of the ethnic differences between themselves and the East Romans. Although they translated “emperor” to the more familiar “tsar” and “Roman” to “Greek,” they made the distinction along linguistic lines between Bulgarians and the populations under the rule of the emperor in Constantinople. Reference to “Orthodoxy” also hints to the fact that the Bulgarian writers recognized the shared religious affiliation of the East Romans. Despite the lack of commentary regarding Byzantium in these sources, as compared to the rich narratives in the East Roman works, a sense of communal identity can be discerned from the Bulgarian ones. The Bulgarians were ruled by tsars, and they spoke a different language from the East Romans; ethnic differences between the two groups were thus delineated linguistically. It should also be stressed that the use of the term “tsar” to describe both Eastern Roman and Bulgarian rulers placed both on the same geopolitical level. Certainly cultural ties between the two remained important, but this was a period when the Second Bulgarian Empire was gaining prominence in a fragmentary East Roman world and Turnovo was increasingly being viewed as a “New Constantinople.”<sup>52</sup>

There is also a sense of historical communal identity in the texts, most pronounced in commentary on the period of East Roman rule before 1185. References to this period of East Roman hegemony come in various forms but often involve discussion of renewal, rebirth, and reconquest. Euthymius in his life of St. John, for example, notes that the Bulgarian state “had been destroyed by the violence of the Greeks,” when writing of the rise of John Asen I.<sup>53</sup> The author of the life of St. John from Dragan's Minei also mentions that John Asen II “renewed” the Bulgarian people.<sup>54</sup> Asen I was

the tsar who restored the ruined Bulgarian state according to Euthymius, and he was the one who reinforced “all Bulgarian strongholds which had been fallen [in disrepair] and renewed those that had been destroyed.” The tsar also conquered the territories of Byzantium and “hurled himself mightily on the Greek tsardom.”<sup>55</sup> In the late fourteenth-century panegyric of St. Philothea, Kalojan is praised for “conquer[ing] the entire Greek land” and, most importantly, retaking the city of Molivot from the East Romans, where the relics of the saint were subsequently moved to the Bulgarian capital of Turnovo.<sup>56</sup> In the *Synodikon*, John Asen I is said to have “set the Bulgarian people free from Greek slavery.”<sup>57</sup> Taking on a more metaphorical stance, in the prophetic historical text the *Vision of the Prophet Isaiah of the Last Times*, written during the period 1204–61, Constantinople is referred to as the “New Jerusalem” and the Eastern Roman emperors are called “tsars.” The text prophesizes that the last two tsars in “Romania” (East Roman Empire) will “destroy all of their magnates with their cruelty” and bring ruin to the land. A dragon (presumably the Bulgarian ruler) will pass through the land of Israel and Moesia (Bulgaria) in a wooden boat and settle in Ovče Pole (Skopje, northern Macedonia), where he will “vanquish all the peoples around.”<sup>58</sup> The overthrow of Greek slavery or the ending of Greek violence would thus lead to the reconquest of Bulgarian lands and the renewal of a Bulgarian nation. A sense of revolt comes across in the Bulgarian sources here, where the East Roman “yoke” was cast off, thereby highlighting the rebellious nature of Bulgaria's population and reflecting the political situation of the time when the Second Bulgarian Empire is in direct competition with East Roman successor states such as Nicaea and Epiros. At a time when the Second Bulgarian Empire is growing, independence from Byzantium takes center stage in the Bulgarian sources.

Despite the previously mentioned examples of East Roman rule, I have found very few explicitly negative portrayals of Byzantium in Bulgarian sources. One notable exception worth mentioning is in the *Sibyl Oracle*, a prophetic text dating to the thirteenth century. In this work, the author provides insight into the self-identity of the Bulgarians during the period. Most important for my discussion here is the text's ranked list of nations and their corresponding characteristics. The *Oracle* says that the Bulgarians

“are good humoured, hospitable and humble, and they like foreigners and Christianity” and that they will be the ones to present to God the “true faith.” The text continues that the third sun (third nation) is the Hellenes or the Greeks, who will stumble three times in their faith and will “present the tsardom to God.” The *Oracle* presents the East Romans as people who “change their tsars, mix with all people, like to brag, bear false witness, are proud and avaricious, and offer bribes in court.”<sup>59</sup> A notable exception, this text portrayed the East Romans in a more critical fashion, especially in comparison to the Bulgarians.

## Conclusion

The sense of communal identity among East Romans was dictated not only by the common characteristics they share along linguistic, religious, and political lines but also by their presentation of themselves as the inverse of outsiders or “barbarians.” For the Bulgarians, collective identity was also developed through common ethnic ties but by a shared common historical past as well. Despite the fact that they viewed Byzantium as a model, the Bulgarians in the thirteenth century used past Eastern Roman hegemony as a source to construct their communal identity.

This study is just meant to be an introduction to East Roman-Bulgarian perceptions; much work still needs to be done on communal identity in the post-1204 eastern Mediterranean. In particular, there is room for further studies on the social relationship between Byzantium and Bulgaria and how contacts between the two impacted each other's identities. Currently, much of the historiography focuses on the political history between the two states, with scholars only offering a small glimpse of the cultural ties between them. There is much to examine with regards to the connections between the two from artistic, architectural, and linguistic perspectives. The transmission of ideas across the East Roman-Bulgarian divide is worth exploring more, as well as the influence that Bulgaria had on Byzantium. Finally, work still needs to be done on the ideological stance of the Bulgarian tsars and how they viewed themselves within the larger eastern Mediterranean and Balkan contexts: how did they perceive themselves, for

example, vis-à-vis other rulers, such as the Latin kings or the Turkish emirs?

## Notes

1. [The historiography on this topic is extensive. For more recent works, see Nikolaos G. Chrissis, Athina Kolia-Dermizaki, and Angeliki Papageorgiou, eds., \*Byzantium and the West: Perception and Reality \(11th–15th C.\)\* \(London: Routledge, 2019\); Samuel Pablo Müller, \*Latins in Roman \(Byzantine\) Histories: Ambivalent Representations in the Long Twelfth Century\* \(Leiden: Brill, 2021\).](#)
2. [For the thirteenth century in particular see for example Ani Dančeva-Vassileva, \*Bŭlgarija i Latinskata Imperija \(1204–1261\)\* \(Sofia: Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, 1985\).](#)
3. [For a general overview of this period see David Jacoby, “The Latin Empire of Constantinople and the Frankish States in Greece,” in \*The New Cambridge Medieval History, vol. 5 c.1198–c.1300\*, ed. David Abulafia \(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999\), 525–42.](#)
4. [See, for example, Anthony Kaldellis, \*Romanland: Ethnicity and Empire in Byzantium\* \(Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019\).](#)
5. [Anthony D. Smith, \*The Ethnic Origins of Nations\* \(Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986\), 21–40.](#)
6. [Gill Page, \*Being Byzantine: Greek Identity before the Ottomans\* \(Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008\), 53–54.](#)
7. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, 53.](#)
8. [See especially Dion C. Smythe, “Insiders and Outsiders,” in \*A Companion to Byzantium\*, ed. Liz James \(London: Blackwell, 2010\) 67–80 and the collection of essays in Dion C. Smythe, ed., \*Strangers to Themselves: The Byzantine Outsider. Papers from the Thirty-Second Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton, March 1998\* \(Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000\)](#)
9. [Niketas Choniates, \*Historia\*, ed. I. A. Van Dieten \(Berlin: De Gruyter, 1975\), ch. 368. For English translation, see Harry J. Magoulias, trans., \*O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates\* \(Detroit: Wayne](#)

- [State University Press, 1984\), 203–4. The most recent discussion of the rebellion appears in Alexandru Madgearu, \*The Asanids: The Political and Military History of the Second Bulgarian Empire \(1185–1280\)\* \(Leiden: Brill, 2017\), 35–83.](#)
10. [Niketas, \*Historia\*, ch. 369, trans. Magoulias, \*O City of Byzantium\*, 204.](#)
  11. [Paul Stephenson, \*Byzantium's Balkan Frontier: A Political Study of the Northern Balkans, 900–1204\* \(Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000\), 293.](#)
  12. [Niketas, \*Historia\*, chs. 369 and 371, trans. Magoulias, \*O City of Byzantium\*, 205.](#)
  13. [Niketas, \*Historia\*, ch. 371, trans. Magoulias, \*O City of Byzantium\*, 205.](#)
  14. [Niketas, \*Historia\*, ch. 372–73, trans. Magoulias, \*O City of Byzantium\*, 205–6.](#)
  15. [Niketas, \*Historia\*, ch. 371, trans. Magoulias, \*O City of Byzantium\*, 205.](#)
  16. [Niketas, \*Historia\*, ch. 468, trans. Magoulias, \*O City of Byzantium\*, 257.](#)
  17. [Niketas, \*Historia\*, ch. 533, trans. Magoulias, \*O City of Byzantium\*, 292; Madgearu, \*Asanids\*, 116; John V.A. Fine Jr., \*The Late Medieval Balkans: A Critical Study from the Late Twelfth Century to the Ottoman Conquest\* \(Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994\), 31–32.](#)
  18. [Niketas, \*Historia\*, ch. 627, trans. Magoulias, \*O City of Byzantium\*, 341–42.](#)
  19. [For Akropolites' viewpoint see especially Page, \*Being Byzantine\*, 97–103.](#)
  20. [George Akropolites, \*Opera\*, vol. 1, ed. A. Heisenberg \(Leipzig, 1903\), ch. 11. For English translation, see George Akropolites, \*The History\*, trans., Ruth Macrides \(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007\), 133.](#)
  21. [Akropolites, \*Opera\*, ch. 11.35–46, trans. Macrides, \*History\*, 133.](#)
  22. [Akropolites, \*Opera\*, ch. 13.46–48, trans. Macrides, \*History\*, 140.](#)
  23. [Akropolites, \*Opera\*, ch. 13.20–21, trans. Macrides, \*History\*, 139.](#)
  24. [Akropolites, \*Opera\*, ch. 13, trans. Macrides, \*History\*, 140.](#)
  25. [Macrides, \*History\*, 92; for the treaty see also Madgearu, \*Asanids\*, 209.](#)
  26. [Akropolites, \*Opera\*, ch. 25, trans. Macrides, \*History\*, 178.](#)
  27. [Akropolites, \*Opera\*, ch. 25, trans. Macrides, \*History\*, 179.](#)
  28. [Akropolites, \*Opera\*, ch. 34, trans. Macrides, \*History\*, 198.](#)
  29. [Akropolites, \*Opera\*, ch. 54, trans. Macrides, \*History\*, 281; Madgearu, \*Asanids\*, 240.](#)

30. [Dimiter G. Angelov, “Theodore II Laskaris, Elena Asenina and Bulgaria,” in \*Srednovkovniiat bŭlgarin i ‘drugite’\* \[The medieval Bulgarian and “the Other”\], eds. Angel Nikolov and Georgi Nikolov \(Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo Sv. Kliment Okhridski, 2013\), 273–97.](#)
31. [\*Theodori Ducae Lascaris Epistulae CCXVII\*, ed. Nicolaus Festa \(Florence: tipografia G. Carnesecchi e figli, 1898\), ep. 200.21 \(p. 247\), ep. 202.27 \(p. 249\), ep. 204.61 \(p. 253\); Angelov, “Theodore II Laskaris,” 288.](#)
32. [\*Theodori Ducae Lascaris Epistulae\*, ep. 199.45–50 \(p. 246\); Angelov, “Theodore II Laskaris,” 288.](#)
33. [\*Theodori Ducae Lascaris Epistulae\*, ep. 204.57–58 \(p. 253\); Angelov, “Theodore II Laskaris,” 288.](#)
34. [Theodorus II Ducas Lascaris, \*Opuscula rhetorica\*, ed. Aloysius Tartaglia \(Munich: K.G. Saur Verlag, 2000\) 29.117–27; Angelov “Theodore II Laskaris,” 283.](#)
35. [Angelov, “Theodore II Laskaris,” 290.](#)
36. [\*Opuscula rhetorica\*, 29.128–32; Angelov, “Theodore II Laskaris,” 282.](#)
37. [\*Opuscula rhetorica\*, 30.138–42; Angelov, “Theodore II Laskaris,” 282.](#)
38. [Some brief discussion of these designations is in Dimiter Angelov, “Prosopography of the Byzantine World \(1204–1261\) in the Light of Bulgarian Sources,” in \*Identities and Allegiances in the Eastern Mediterranean after 1204\*, eds. Judith Herrin and Guillaume Saint-Guillain \(Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011\), 111.](#)
39. [Veselin Beshevliev ed., \*Die protobulgarischen Inschriften\* \(Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1963\), 156. English translation in Kiril Petkov, \*The Voices of Medieval Bulgaria, Seventh–Fifteenth Century: The Records of a Bygone Culture\* \(Leiden: Brill, 2008\), 12. Further discussion of these earlier sources can be found in Angel Nikolov, “Empire of the Romans or Tsardom of the Greeks? The Image of Byzantium in the Earliest Slavonic Translations from Greek,” \*Byzantinoslavica\* 65 \(2007\): 31–40.](#)
40. [Beshevliev, \*Die protobulgarischen Inschriften\*, 156; Petkov, \*Voices of Medieval Bulgaria\*, 12.](#)
41. [Jordan Zaimov and Vasilka Tŭpkova-Zaimova, \*Bitolskijat nadpis na Ivan Vladislav, samodarzec balgarski\* \[The Bitola inscription of Ivan](#)



- [Vladislav, \*Bulgarian Samodazhet\*\] \(Sofia: Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, 1970\), 33; \[Petkov, \\*Voices of Medieval Bulgaria\\*, 39.\]\(#\)](#)
42. [J. Ivanov, \*Bogomiski knigi i legendi\* \[Bogomiski books and legends\] \(Sofia: Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, 1925\), 280–87; \[Petkov, \\*Voices of Medieval Bulgaria\\*, 196–98.\]\(#\)](#)
  43. [Kazimir Popkonstantinov and Otto Kronsteiner, eds. and trans., \*Starobŭlgarski nadpisi / Altbulgarischen Inschriften\* \(Vienna, 1994–97\), 22:166–68; \[Petkov, \\*Voices of Medieval Bulgaria\\*, 217, 425.\]\(#\)](#)
  44. [Popkonstantinov and Kronsteiner, \*Starobŭlgarski nadpisi\*, 167–68; \[Petkov, \\*Voices of Medieval Bulgaria\\*, 425.\]\(#\)](#)
  45. [Petkov, \*Voices of Medieval Bulgaria\*, 222; \[Angelov “Prosopography of Byzantine World,” 114; see also Francesco Dall’Aglia, “Rex or Imperator? Kalojan's Royal Title in the Correspondence with Innocent III,” \\*Studia Ceranea\\* 9 \\(2019\\): 171–85.\]\(#\)](#)
  46. [Michael Popruzhenko, ed., \*Sinodik tsarja Borila\* \[Synod of Zarja Borila\] \(Sofia: Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, 1928\), ch. 113; \[Petkov, \\*Voices of Medieval Bulgaria\\*, 256–57.\]\(#\)](#)
  47. [Angelov, “Prosopography of the Byzantine,” 112](#)
  48. [Jordan Ivanov, \*Bŭlgarski starini iz Makedonija\* \(Sofia: Nauka i Izkustvo, 1970\), 98–99; \[Petkov, \\*Voices of Medieval Bulgaria\\*, 276–77.\]\(#\)](#)
  49. [Petkov, \*Voices of Medieval Bulgaria\*, 349.](#)
  50. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, 264.](#)
  51. [Stephan Kozuharov, “Neizvesten letopisen razkaz ot vremeto na Ioan Asen II” \[An unknown historical account from the time of John Assen I\], \*Literaturna missal\* 2 \(1974\): 126–29; \[Petkov, \\*Voices of Medieval Bulgaria\\*, 439.\]\(#\)](#)
  52. [For the importance of Turnovo see especially Miliana Kaimakamova, “Turnovo – New Constantinople: The Third Rome in the Fourteenth Century Bulgarian Translation of Constantine Manasses’ \*Synopsis Chronike\*,” in \*The Medieval Chronicle IV\*, ed. Erik Kooper \(New York: Rodopi, 2006\), 91–104.](#)
  53. [Petkov, \*Voices of Medieval Bulgaria\*, 349.](#)
  54. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, 264.](#)
  55. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, 349.](#)
  56. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, 351.](#)

57. [Popruzhenko, \*Sinodik tsarja Borila\*, ch. 91; Petkov, \*Voices of Medieval Bulgaria\*, 254; Angelov, “Prosopography of the Byzantine,” 116.](#)
58. [Pavel Sreckovic, \*Zbornik popa Dragolja. Sadržina i proroshstva\* \[The anthology of Pope Dragolj: The content of the prophecy\] \(Belgrade: U Državnoj štampariji Kraljevine Srbije, 1890\), 15–16; Petkov, \*Voices of Medieval Bulgaria\*, 528–29.](#)
59. [Petkov, \*Voices of Medieval Bulgaria\*, 522.](#)

## **PART IV**

# Adaptations and Transmissions across Media and Geographies

19

SILVERSMITHS IN  
SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE  
Visual Culture between Islam,  
Byzantium, and the Latin West

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Even a little flower in the empty space around a scene on a silver object can tell a lot about the relationship between the Orthodox world and the Ottomans, perhaps even more than the main image itself. This is the case for the introduction of *rumi-hatayi* motifs in the decoration of many works by the Bulgarian masters,<sup>1</sup> wonderfully exemplified in the embossment of the so-called Cherepish Gospel, dated 1616, where also a multitude of little flowers and other vegetal elements occupy the empty space around the figures of saints.<sup>2</sup> This peculiar mix of elements belonging to different visual traditions, however, is not an exception; many artworks are representative of this fruitful coexistence. The Byzantine tradition, the Ottoman world, and the Latin West are all part of the culture (and visual culture) of the goldsmiths of Southeastern Europe during the eve and the

aftermath of the fall of Byzantium. The careful observation of their artwork can lead us to a better understanding of the multicultural essence of this region, which extends from the northern shores of the Low Danube to the southern part of the Balkan peninsula.

The “Byzantine question,” that is, the issues concerning the relationship between Western medieval and Byzantine art, has been the subject of investigation for generations of scholars,<sup>3</sup> but less scholarly attention has been devoted to the study of the links between post-Byzantine and Western art, despite the equally rich and challenging nature of this area of research. This chapter explores the eclectic visual culture of goldsmiths active in Southeastern Europe, especially in the Low Danube area (Romanian lands, Serbia, Bulgaria), in order to offer an introduction to the potential fruitfulness of more extensive research into the post-Byzantine arts, which can lead to a better understanding of the circulation of master artisans, models, and techniques and their reception and adaptation in different contexts. The chapter also challenges some stereotypes in academic literature, like the dominant position of late Byzantine artistic culture as the most characteristic element of Balkan Orthodox art or the idea of a passive and delayed reception of Western innovation, which is reflected in the biased terminology used by scholars when referring to art objects from Southeastern Europe.

After the *halosis* (the fall of Constantinople in 1453), the Byzantine world splintered, and Southeastern Europe became the dividing line and—at the same time—the meeting point between Islam and Christendom, just as it had previously been the contact point between occidental and oriental Christendom. The *halosis* had undoubtedly a deep impact upon the system of contacts and the networks of exchange between East and West, but it did not sever them.<sup>4</sup> For instance, the trading routes that connected Europe to the East penetrated deep into the Balkans and extended to Thessaloniki and eventually Constantinople through the via Egnatia. These routes allowed for a tight, stable network of contact between East and West that continued even after 1453.<sup>5</sup> Together with merchants, clergy, and ambassadors, artists and artisans traveled along the Balkan routes, promoting contact and mutual exchange in virtually every artistic field: this dynamic substrate allowed the

coexistence of different stylistic models that developed autonomously in multiple areas of the peninsula.

Of course, the year 1453 is essentially symbolic, the final and most tragic act of a longer crisis. In several areas of the Balkans, the age “after Byzantium” had already begun at the end of the fourteenth century, after the battle of Kossovopolje (1389), which represented the starting point of Ottoman control for several regions south of the Danube.<sup>6</sup> Thus, even before 1453, Serbian territories and Romanian lands played pivotal roles in the conveyance of culture, architecture, and art of Byzantine derivation. The rulers of these areas were open to the presence of Western theologians, musicians, humanists of all sorts, and monastic orders were active throughout the peninsula—together, these elements fostered the creation of a rich, multicultural environment.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, objects, prints, and drawings were in circulation, preparing the ground for the development of not only distinct visual cultures that were autonomous but also part of the same international background.

The interconnectedness of different political and artistic centers of the Danubian area, the whole of Southeastern Europe, the Eastern Empire, and the “neighboring” Central European and Western countries is essential to understand the rich visual culture of the craftsmen and the great “visual alphabet” they accessed in their productions. Goldsmiths, in particular, had a wide range of available models, which were related partly to the requests of their clients and partly to their own visual cultures. As discussed later, this plurality of inputs is especially evident in the objects made for clients with a religious and visual culture that differed from that of the goldsmiths.

The stipulations of Orthodox clients were substantially linked to the function of the commissioned object: its role in the Orthodox rite and also its symbolic and political value are reflected in the structure and fundamental themes of its primary iconography. Therefore, the visual culture of the goldsmith is manifest in a more or less evident way in the object's surrounding decoration. A clear example is represented by the *kivotion* (a container for the consecrated bread and wine), purchased by Orthodox lay and religious elites as gifts to churches and monasteries. The shape of a *kivotion* is usually architectural, but the techniques employed and the ornamental styles are extremely varied and—as well as for other

Ortodox religious vessels—reflect the different provenance, visual culture and, as we will see, religious identity of the craftsmen ([Figures 19.1](#) and [19.2](#)).



ДАРОХРАНИЛИЦА  
РАД ЗЛАТАРА ДМИТРА ИЗ ЛИПОВЕ  
1550/51.  
TABERNACLE  
WORK OF GOLDSMITH DMITAR FROM LIPOVA  
1550/51

[Figure 19.1 Dmitar of Lipova, kivoton, 1550–51, Museum of the Serbian Church, Belgrade.](#)

Source: Anita Paolicchi.





[Figure 19.2](#) [Lukas Baum, kivotion, Iași, 1687, National Museum of Art of Romania.](#)

*Source:* Author, National Museum of Art of Romania.

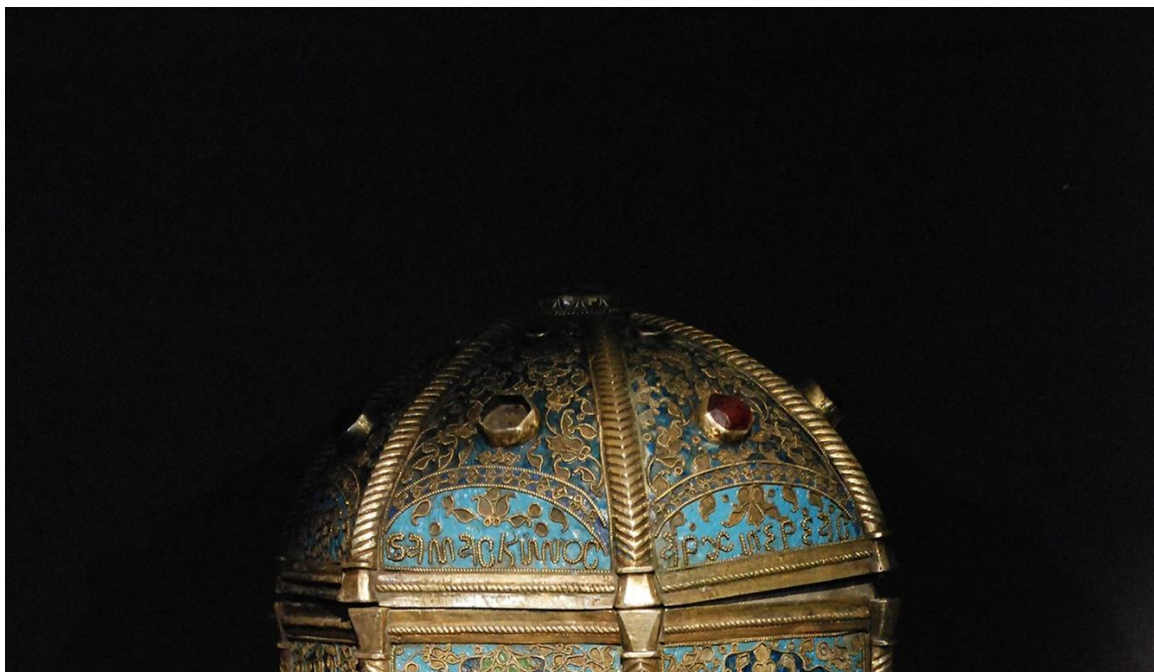
## **The Multiple Sources for the Visual Cultures of Goldsmiths**

The Ottoman domination in the Balkans had included, since its beginning, control of the silver mines, a main source of income for the empire.<sup>8</sup> The sultan needed great amounts of cash for his administrative apparatus and, in particular, to create, maintain, and lead huge armies to distant battlefields. For these reasons, gold and silver mines were the main military targets of his expansion in the Balkans, together with the rich towns that had flourished in the areas surrounding the mines, as centers of international trade quickly fell under Ottoman control. As observed by Maximilian Hartmuth, the pivotal importance of the Balkan mines decreased during the long wars between the Ottomans and the Habsburgs in the seventeenth century, which left mines without miners. Additionally, the arrival of cheap silver from the Americas had an impact.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, local silversmith workshops continued to develop well into the eighteenth century, recording a remarkable increase in the quantity and quality of their production.

Orthodox ecclesiastic silver objects continued to be produced, and despite political turmoil, elite patrons continued to order precious objects as gifts for monasteries all over the Balkans. These costly religious objects were therefore political instruments aimed at reinforcing Christian Orthodox identity in opposition to the Turkish threat, especially after the fall of Constantinople. The agenda of buttressing Orthodoxy explains the conservative attitude evident in Byzantine visual culture: the form, layout, and iconography chosen for expensive liturgical objects were meant to uphold the traditional Byzantine standard and proclaim its continuance.

Nevertheless, Ottoman elements, such as arabesques, stylized flowers, and abstract motifs, easily became part of the visual lexicon of the artists directly or indirectly in contact with the Ottoman culture and were integrated in their production.<sup>10</sup> This integration is evident in some outstanding objects connected to the Eucharist (many currently in the National Church Museum of History and Archaeology of the Holy Synod,

Sofia), whose surfaces are entirely enameled and covered with stylized vegetal ornamentation (mainly lotus palmettes, little leaves, hollyhocks, and carnations in full bloom; i.e., [Figure 19.3](#)).<sup>11</sup> In spite of the noticeable Eastern aesthetic of the colorful floral filigree, this technique is not actually common in objects of Islamic manufacture in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>12</sup> The use of this technique in ecclesiastical silverware is attested from about the mid-seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth centuries. In addition to the workshops furnishing objects for the monastery of Bachkovo (and possibly active in the area surrounding present-day Plovdiv), the Christian workshops in Constantinople and in Trikala in Thessaly (today in Greece) are also credited with such enamels. The use of such designs reflects the aesthetic choices of the craftsmen as well as the social status and tastes of the donors. It should also be noted that these works were produced in cultural centers that were simultaneously wealthy mining settlements and trade and craft centers, with populations of mixed confessional affiliation. This peculiar and distinctive ornamental style can be read as a solution developed by the artistic masters of Plovdiv to please wealthy patrons (namely local representatives of the Ottoman administration) who were already familiar with Ottoman culture and with the aniconic style of Muslim art.





[Figure 19.3 Artophorion, enameled silver, 1705, National Church Museum of History and Archaeology of the Holy Synod, Sofia.](#)

Source: Anita Paolicchi.

While the Bachkovo workshops preferred filigree enamel, Chiprovian goldsmiths chiseled decoration onto plates. An example is a liturgical cup used by the monks to pour or drink holy water on Epiphany ([Figure 19.4](#)). The cup's rim is adorned with an arabesque motif, similar to that widespread in the entire peninsula. On the spherical body of the cup are three rosettes of Ottoman inspiration, with elongated petals turning into palmettes, while the birds on the upper half are a traditional element of Byzantine silverware. The Chiprovian craftsmen (active since the end of the

sixteenth century) also mastered the techniques of engraving, casting, hammering, gilding, openwork, enameling, and encrusting with colored stones. Their sophisticated production was highly appreciated by the upper-class clergy of Bulgarian, Serbian, and Wallach-Moldovan monasteries.<sup>13</sup> At the end of the seventeenth century, Chiprovian artisans were forced to leave the region, and they found protection at the Wallachian court (now in southern Romania), where they introduced the floral motif of Ottoman inspiration in the empty spaces left around imagery.<sup>14</sup> The Chiprovtsi goldsmiths' ateliers are an interesting case study also because the city had been a center of Catholic evangelization attempts, so that local goldsmiths were familiar with objects used the Catholic service. In this period, in Wallachia, as well as in other areas at the border between East and West, such as Serbia, the familiarity with Western and Central European art was already evident in the Gothic, Renaissance, and Baroque decorative elements pervasive in almost every artistic domain, from architecture to topiary.



[Figure 19.4 Liturgical cup, gilded silver, sixteenth century, National Museum of History \(inv. no. 33442\), Sofia, Bulgaria.](#)

*Source:* Todor Dimitrov.

Often, goldsmiths worked for customers with an ethnicity, confession, and visual culture that was different from their own. Most of the production of silver and gold objects commissioned in Wallachia was realized by Saxon Transylvanian craftsmen, not only in the workshops to which they belonged, but also directly in the Wallachian princely court. Obviously, those craftsmen had to please the Orthodox customers and therefore closely followed instructions regarding shape, function, and general appearance. Nevertheless, they succeeded in introducing Western visual elements to these projects that belonged to their own cultural backgrounds. Quite unexpectedly, Gothic, Renaissance and baroque features coexisted, creating a new mix with the more traditional Byzantine core elements.<sup>15</sup>

*Kivotia*, as eucharistic containers with a pivotal role in the Orthodox rite, provide good examples of the way a specific (local or individual) visual culture could intersect with Byzantine tradition. These objects are attested from the entirety of the Balkans (from Serbia to Wallachia, to Greece) and beyond. In most of the cases, they had an architectural shape, but their decoration varied greatly in different areas.<sup>16</sup> The eucharistic containers realized by Transylvanian master craftsmen for Orthodox monasteries under the protection of the Wallachian court are marvelous examples of fruitful overlapping. They took the traditional shape of a church, often the very one for which they were commissioned;<sup>17</sup> however, their decorative schema and the variety of techniques used on a single object were peculiar to the Saxon goldsmiths active in Braşov and Sibiu.

Only a few hundred kilometers away, notably in Slavonia, Herzegovina, and Moldavia, several examples of *kivotion* that have the same structure as their dedicated church do not, however, display the characteristic floral and figurative decoration, variously declined in different localities. Instead, these *kivotia* favor a decorative schema using the written word, usually a dedication, with the text running along the four sides of the object on parallel lines ([Figure 19.2](#)).<sup>18</sup> The reasons behind the appearance of this peculiar decorative concept are unknown, but they are possibly connected to the specific religious and political context of the territories where this container's typology appears. This area had early experiences with aniconic religious practices, such as Islam and Christian confessions that leaned toward aniconism (namely the Protestant movements spreading from

Transylvania). The preference for the written word used with both decorative and communicative intentions can be linked to the goldsmiths' likely familiarity with the Muslim, Lutheran, or Calvinistic cultures in which the written word was central.

### **Prints as a Medium and Their Adaptations**

Figurative and technical novelties were commonly transmitted by the artisans circulating between the East and the West, as well as obviously by the objects themselves (since the precious items were generally small and easily transported). However, an increasingly pivotal role for the introduction of specific iconographies and models was played by prints and engravings. Their wide circulation was guaranteed by their small dimensions and relative affordability. The Transylvanian goldsmiths, who maintained contact with the great Central European centers, played an important part in the introduction of new iconographies to the Orthodox regions and became intermediaries between the traditional Byzantine visual culture and Western innovations. The fundamental role played by prints and engravings in such a process is easy to demonstrate.

An adamant example is given by a group of metallic Gospels book bindings made at the end of the seventeenth century, nowadays belonging to museums and ecclesiastic collections in Romania, Mount Athos, and Jerusalem ([Figure 19.5](#)). The layout of the ornamentation on the silver plates of the front and back boards of the bindings is the traditional Byzantine one, which features a central biblical scene surrounded by several medallions depicting figures from the Old and New Testaments (prophets, Apostles, and Evangelists). In this group of bindings, however, the subject of twenty-six out of thirty-six medallions is the Apocalypse of John, which is unprecedented for liturgical objects in the Orthodox world. Furthermore, the iconography employed on the binding does not conform to the typical Byzantine standard: quite unexpectedly, twenty-one out of the twenty-six apocalyptic scenes on the book covers are, in fact, "copies" of Lucas Cranach the Elder's xylographies for the Apocalypse of the Luther Bible. The source material is unquestionable, despite the different artistic medium inevitably forcing the goldsmith to somewhat simplify the arrangement of the figures and, above all, to reduce the number of elements

of the composition. Obviously, the Transylvanian goldsmiths had firsthand access to a Lutheran illustrated Bible, and it is no surprise that they used the book as a model.<sup>19</sup>







[Figure 19.5 Master EV, Embossment with scene of the Apocalypse for a Gospel, gilded silver, end of the seventeenth century, National Museum of Art of Romania.](#)

*Source:* National Museum of Art of Romania.

Additional significant examples of the circulation of Western iconographic models are the tankards made by Sebestyén Hann at the end of the seventeenth century.<sup>20</sup> The bodies of several tankards display representations of the Judgment of Solomon, in a composition apparently modeled on the Raphaellesque fresco on the twelfth vault of the Vatican Loggia (ca. 1519). A number of differences, though, make clear that Hann's versions are not a firsthand copies of the originals.<sup>21</sup> The iconographic medium that most likely inspired Hann's work is the engraving by Matthäus Merian the Elder, a renowned engraver and printmaker of Swiss origin, active several decades before Hann ([Figure 19.6](#)).<sup>22</sup> Prints could be easily reproduced and circulated. Raphael's frescoes in the Vatican Loggia were renowned already in the sixteenth century, and a great number of engravers issued collections of prints depicting their imagery. These scenes soon became popular prototypes for Biblical illustrations.





[Figure 19.6](#) [Sebastyen Hann, Reschner tankard, gilded silver, 1675–1700, National Museum of Art of Romania.](#)

*Source:* National Museum of Art of Romania.

In the case of both the metal book bindings and Hann's tankards, the goldsmiths had a great understanding of the meaning underlying the

original models they consulted and were able to adapt them to new contexts. In the former case, the author, known as Master EV after his hallmark, was undoubtedly aware of the papal criticism of Cranach's prototype and transformed it into an anti-Ottoman discourse, which was more appropriate and appreciated by his Wallachian patrons: for example, the Great Babylon, originally represented wearing the Papal tiara to symbolize the corruption of the Papacy, was substituted with a woman lacking any specific iconographic attribute, but adored by people wearing a turban.<sup>23</sup> In the latter case, Hann, who was not dealing with a politically resonant model, simply transformed the soldier's sword into an Ottoman saber to better adapt the image to a local time and context.

## **Workshops and Corporations**

Traditional workshop and corporation practices are fundamental to understanding how models and iconographic novelties could circulate so easily between Western Europe and the East. Each workshop had a set of examples to which the master artisans could look for reference, in the form of drawings, prints, objects, or molds. In the Danube area, the organization of goldsmiths only occurred in the late Middle Ages and, even then, came about unevenly. In the major Transylvanian cities, professional corporations began in the fifteenth century to organize themselves by establishing common norms, rules, and sanctions to punish craftsmen who did not comply.<sup>24</sup> For goldsmith guilds, the statutes generally also provided a system of punching that certified the origin of the artifacts and guaranteed the fineness of the precious metal used, thus verifying that the goldsmiths operated in compliance with the guild's rules.<sup>25</sup> On a work created by a guild artisan, there were therefore usually two marks: one for the maker, often identified by initials, and one for the city, usually its coat of arms.<sup>26</sup> The oldest known statute of a Transylvanian goldsmith guild is that of Cluj, dating to 1473, which mentions, however, the existence of a similar association in Sibiu.<sup>27</sup> In the following decades, the foundation of other guilds is attested (Mediaș in 1494, Brașov in 1511, and Dej in 1586).

It is not surprising that these corporate guilds established themselves in urban contexts, while in areas characterized by feudal administration, a

courtly type of goldsmith activity remained in place, with small ateliers supported by voivode courts or workshops near monastic entities that could fulfill the constant demand for devotional artifacts (as was the case of the aforementioned workshops of Plovdiv). Especially in the centuries of Ottoman domination, religious centers continued to play this patronage role, particularly following a general disaggregation of the elites who had traditionally commissioned precious artworks.<sup>28</sup>

While in Transylvania only masters belonging to the Saxon community could operate in the context of the corporations, on the opposite side of the Balkans, in seventeenth-century Trikala (at the time, the largest urban center of the region), the great ethnic and religious variety of the population was reflected in the presence of both Muslim and non-Muslim goldsmiths. While there is no evidence that the Muslim artisans were organized in guilds, the non-Muslim goldsmiths probably were.<sup>29</sup> The coexistence of different Christian confessions with the Muslim population following the Ottoman conquest is key to the artistic production of the goldsmith workshops. The combination of structural elements and ornaments connected both to the Byzantine tradition and Ottoman visual culture affected the goldsmiths' ability to respond to the needs, tastes, and requests of their patrons.

### **Art, Terminology, and Politics**

The Ottoman presence in the Balkans and the propagandistic agenda of the Roman Catholic Church threatened Orthodox rulers, especially after the *halosis*. As a result, there was a reinforcement of Orthodox identity. Orthodox rulers supported the foundation of monasteries at home, in other Balkan kingdoms, and on Mount Athos as a way to counteract the Turkish rule and Western Catholic influence.<sup>30</sup> This led to the creation of a sort of "Byzantine commonwealth," as Dimitri Obolensky calls it.<sup>31</sup>

It is worth pointing out that, although local national identities emerged leading to the birth of the modern Balkan states, it is the Balkan commonwealth that enabled the survival of the "Byzantine world" (that is, general Byzantine religious culture and its traditions) after the fall of Constantinople. The result was the persistence of conservative Byzantine

models until the late eighteenth century, particularly in the domain of art and architecture.

On the other hand, thanks to the dynamic substrate created by the coexistence of different ethnic and religious communities (both before and after the *halosis*), multiple visual cultures fruitfully coexisted in a common framework without eclipsing one another. These dynamic - though opposed - forces are clearly witnessed in the applied arts, as discussed earlier, thanks to their intrinsic adaptability.<sup>32</sup> In most of the aforementioned examples, the shape and the general style of liturgical objects were carefully planned by the patron to convey the most appropriate symbolic, religious, or political meaning. They therefore tended to conservatively adhere to Byzantine tradition but were, at the same time, open to “exotic” stylistic novelties, reflecting the different decorative tendencies that were the result of the dynamic network of relations characterizing the Balkans.

In such a complex context, finding appropriate terminology is difficult since many words belong to a lexicon that may be suitable for structuring an art-historical formal analysis of a single object but become inappropriate when it comes to talking about cultural history and the art object as the result of a cultural phenomenon or context. Terms such as “Eastern,” “Western,” and “local” are undoubtedly useful to map the appearance, diffusion, or persistence of a variety of visual elements, but at the same time, they negate the dynamism that characterizes their reception in the Balkans, as well as the existence of common elements in different parts of the peninsula, even if they are articulated with different sensibilities and contexts. Also, the concept of “post-Byzantine” is sometime ambiguous because it has both a chronological and a cultural meaning. It basically suggests the persistence of Byzantine cultural and visual elements in a context that struggles to keep “Byzantium” alive after its political disappearance. From this point of view, any visual element that does not belong to the Byzantine tradition risks being perceived as exogenous and foreign, even if such an element in that specific context is, in fact, consistent with the multicultural panorama.

The idea of a Western “influence” on the art of the Balkan artisans must also be refused.<sup>33</sup> Despite the introduction of models originally developed in Western and Central Europe, which later appear in the production of

Danubian and Balkan goldsmith work, these outside novelties were not passively received.

A complementary observation is that any analysis based on mere national or geographical criteria is worthless. Speaking about Romanian, Serbian, or Macedonian medieval art is not conducive to a coherent discussion because the fluid contact enabled by the numerous routes that crossed the Balkans made such boundaries indefinable, even if they were—politically speaking—clear.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, until the modern age, the identity of a person or a community was primarily defined by ethnical and religious factors, not on administrative geographical criteria. In my opinion, “the Balkans,” “the Danubian area,” or other terms indicative of wider historical regions are preferred as investigation fields, even if these terms, too, can be extremely problematic. As stated by Anna Ballian, even if “a common Balkan mentality can perhaps be traced in the pre-nationalistic age, when Orthodox Christianity was the tie binding the Balkan peoples ... in the bosom of the Ottoman Empire,” this term “Balkan art” is not historically attested as a self-referential concept in any of the Balkan peoples’ self-narratives and is used only rarely in the artistic historiography to identify folk art or, in silverwork, early modern lay objects bearing Ottoman aesthetics.<sup>35</sup>

The analysis of the visual culture of the various religious or ethnic groups that inhabited or traveled in Southeastern Europe and the Balkans is not only productive but it is also possibly the key to understanding why a certain style or a certain iconography appeared in a specific place and time. Religious or ethnic communities shared the same cultural background, which implied a common visual culture. However, on the other hand, this did not necessarily imply that a common identity was geographically defined since many different ethnic and religious groups inhabited the same area.

While the structural elements of a certain object were determined by its function and were usually clearly dictated to the goldsmith by the customer, the cultural identity of the goldsmith himself is more easily apparent in portions of the decoration or in the structural and iconographic details that were not specified by the patron. While in areas characterized by a culturally “homogeneous” population—such as the Catholic nations or Byzantine Greece—the purchasers and the goldsmiths usually shared the

same visual culture, in multicultural regions like the Balkans, these often differed. Accordingly, liturgical vessels allow us to investigate the ways different cultures coexisted.

## Conclusion

The production of metalwork was deeply affected by the transfer of artistic practices, as well as by the movements of master craftsmen, not only in the Balkan Peninsula but also in the wide zone between the Latin West and the Orthodox East. The identities of the goldsmiths who transversed this area are largely unknown. A known goldsmith, however, makes an illustrative anomaly: Gerolamo Campagnani, from Venice, resided permanently in Constantinople, in the Büyükdere district (the northern part of the European side of the city), where he owned a house. From documents related to a dispute with some Dutch merchants from whom he probably bought gold for his creations, we learn that Campagnani often spent long periods in Wallachia. He definitely worked there between 1698 and 1700, but his single attested work, a golden crown and hand covers for the icon of the Wallachian monastery of Dintr-un-lemn, is dated to 1711, suggesting repeated journeys between Wallachia and Constantinople.<sup>36</sup>

The fact that Western European models were circulating in Southeastern Europe does not mean that they were passively received. Artistic innovations were also not exclusively the result of the artistic genius of the master. As demonstrated by some exceptional documents, it was sometimes the case that the purchaser intentionally commissioned foreign masters to craft objects in a particular “foreign” style. For example, the Wallachian ruler Neagoe Basarab (1459–1521) hired a Saxon goldsmith from Sibiu called Celestinus to make a censer: as the ruler requested in a letter, the censer was to be “in the shape of the tower of your city,” which was Gothic, “because we have never seen a more beautiful tower during our journeys across Hungary.”<sup>37</sup> Neagoe appears to have been so pleased by the “Western” architecture that he desired an object openly inspired by a real Gothic tower. The Western feature of the censer resulted, in this case, from the will of the patron, not the vision or culture of the maker.

These considerations call for the definitive dismissal of the “center versus periphery” logic that still endures in scholarship, despite pivotal contributions of authors like Anthony Eastmond.<sup>38</sup> The Balkans are not the periphery of Byzantium, and they were not the place where the innovations of the capital were imitated at a lower quality. Nor are the Balkans peripheral to Western Europe, mimicking occidental styles in a weak and delayed echo. I am not advocating, however, for a regional approach that easily shifts toward separatism, ignoring the system of exchange and the circulation of models and masters. Instead, I encourage us to “decolonize” our perception of post-Byzantine art and re-evaluate the Balkans as part of a common history of art and culture that unites the East and the West, before and after the fall of Constantinople.

## Notes

1. [Lilyana Stankova, “Sixteenth-Century Silver Vessels from the Collections of Sofia's National Archaeological Institute with Museum and National Historical Museum,” in \*Ottoman Metalwork in the Balkans and in Hungary\*, eds. Ibolya Gerelyes and Maximilian Hartmuth \(Budapest: Hungarian National Museum, 2015\), 163–79.](#)
2. [Teofana Matakieva-Lilkova, “69: Embossment of the Cherepish Gospel, 1616,” in \*Christian Art in Bulgaria\*, ed. Teofana Matakieva-Lilkova \(Sofia: Borina, 2001\), 164–65.](#)
3. [It has led to the publication of many noteworthy contributions, including the art-historical study \*Byzantine Art and the West\* \(1970\) by Otto Demus. Nevertheless, the understanding of what Byzantium was and represented is far from being complete: Averil Cameron, \*Byzantine Matters\* \(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014\).](#)
4. [The first one to challenge the idea of the \*halosis\* as the ending point of the history of Byzantium was the Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga \(1871–1940\), who published \*Byzance après Byzance\* \(Bucharest: Éditions de l’Institut d’études byzantines, 1935\).](#)
5. [An important contribution is given by the Romanian art historian Răzvan Theodorescu, who analyzed the main “cultural channels” that connected Venice to Constantinople through the Balkans: \*Bizant\*,](#)



- Balcani, *Occident la începuturile culturii medievale românești (secole X–XIV)* [Byzantium, Balkans and the West at the origin of medieval Romanian culture (tenth to fourteenth centuries)] (Bucharest: Editura Academiei RSR, 1974).
6. Grigore Arbore Popescu, “L’identità religiosa e l’identità culturale e politica dell’Europa orientale e del sud-est dopo la caduta dell’Impero bizantino,” in *Cristiani d’Oriente: Spiritualità, arte e potere nell’Europa post bizantina*, ed. Grigore Arbore Popescu (Milan: Electa, 1999), 17–25, at 18–19.
  7. Popescu, “Identità religiosa,” 19.
  8. Boško Bojović, “Entre Venise et l’Empire ottoman, les métaux précieux des Balkans (XVe–XVIe siècle),” *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 60, no. 6 (2005): 1277–97. The presence of gold and silver mines in Novo Brdo, Srebrenica, Rudnik, Smederevo, Kratovo, Chiprovtsi, and elsewhere is attested in Ottoman documents; see Stankova, “Sixteenth-Century Silver Vessels from the Collections of Sofia's National Archaeological Institute with Museum and National Historical Museum,” 163.
  9. Maximilian Hartmuth, “Mineral Exploitation and Artistic Production in the Balkans after 1250,” in Gerelyes and Hartmuth, *Ottoman Metalwork in the Balkans*, 97–110, at 99, 109.
  10. Even in the previous centuries, contact with the Islamic East had been a source of enrichment of the repertoire of motifs of the Byzantine ornaments; see Oleg Grabar, “Islamic Influence on Byzantine Art,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. Alexander P. Kazhdan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 1:1018–19.
  11. Ivan Sotirov, entries for “Calice” and “Brocchetta,” in *Tesori dell’arte cristiana in Bulgaria*, ed. Valentino Pace (Sofia: Borina, 2000), 241–42.
  12. The sixteenth-century traveler Evliya Çelebi stated in his reports that the most skilled masters in the enamel technique are not Turks; see Evliya Efendi, *Narrative of Travels in Europe, Asia and Africa* (London, 1850), 2:48. As observed by James Allan and Julian Raby, Evliya Çelebi is a trustworthy source, being son to a master and a goldsmith himself (“Metalwork,” in *Tulips, Arabesques and Turbans: Decorative Arts from the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Yanni Petsopoulos

- [London: Alexandria, 1982], 20–22). For a short overview on Evliya Çelebi's biography, see Efendi, *Narrative of Travels*, 1:v.
13. Ivan Sotirov is the author of the first monographic work about the goldsmiths of Chiprovtsi: Иван Сотиров, Чипровска златарска школа [The goldsmiths of the Chiprovtsi school] (Sofia: Agato, 1984; republished in an extended version in 2001).
  14. This can be appreciated in several works donated to Wallachian monastic foundations: For example, the kivotion of the Tismana Monastery. See Anita Paolicchi, “The Kivotion of Tismana Monastery,” in *Mapping Eastern Europe*, eds. M. A. Rossi and A. I. Sullivan, accessed June 25, 2022, <https://mappingeasterneurope.princeton.edu>. For a general overview on the presence of Bulgarian goldsmiths working in Wallachia, see Dinu Giurescu, “Maîtres orfèvres de Kiprovać en Valachie au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle,” *Revue des études sud-est européennes* 2, nos. 3–4 (1964): 467–510.
  15. This phenomenon is clearly visible also in architecture and is called the “Brancovan style,” after the name of Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu, who led it to its prominence. As stated by Etele Kiss, the presence of Gothic elements in objects from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries constitutes rather the survival of late Gothic forms than a revival (as observable at the same time in other parts of Europe), and they may be traced to Saxon workshops in Transylvania, which not only furnished the Wallachian and Moldavian aristocracy but also supplied southern Hungary and Dalmatia as well. See Etele Kiss, “Eclecticism among Goldsmiths under Ottoman Rule, or Framing the Sacred in Protestant Borderlands,” in Gerelyes and Hartmuth, *Ottoman Metalwork in the Balkans*, 111–32, at 120.
  16. For an overview: Dušan Milovanović, ed., *Masterpieces of Serbian Goldsmiths’ Work: 13th–18th Century* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1981); Corina Nicolescu, *Argintăria laică și religioasă în Țările Române (sec. XIV–XIX) [Lay and religious silverware in the Romanian Lands (fourteenth to nineteenth centuries)]* (Bucharest: Întreprinderea Poligrafică, 1968).

17. [This formal connection was common at that time. In the context of the Wallachian court, it had the specific function of reinforcing the image of the donor as a patron. See Anita Paolicchi, "Les chivote à l'époque de Constantin Brâncoveanu," in \*Microarchitecture et figures du bâti: l'échelle à l'épreuve de la matière\* \(Paris: Picard, 2018\), 87–96.](#)
18. [See Bojana Radojković, \*Српско златарство XVI и XVII века\* \[Serbian gold manufacturing in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries\] \(Novi Sad: Matica srpska, 1966\), 127–29.](#)
19. [Furthermore, the Apocalypse as an iconographic subject was absent in the Orthodox culture until the second half of the sixteenth century. This means that—lacking any articulated iconographic cycle dedicated to this subject in the Orthodox East—the only possible model was represented by Western authors. Anita Paolicchi, "Lutheran Apocalyptic imagery in the Orthodox context," \*Arts\* 12, no. 3 \(2023\): 99.](#)
20. [Viorica Guy Marica, \*Sebastian Hann\* \(Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia, 1972\).](#)
21. [Besides, it is unlikely that Hann ever had a chance to admire the original models in Rome personally, even though he was a prominent artist within the Wallachian-Transylvanian area.](#)
22. [I deal with this case study in Anita Paolicchi, "Da Raffaello a Sebastian Hann: Un itinerario nella cultura visiva degli orafi transilvani," in \*Gli antichi Stati italiani e l'Europa Centro-Orientale tra il tardo Medioevo e l'Età moderna\*, eds. Cristian Luca and Gianluca Masi \(Brăila-Udine: Istros-Campanotto, 2015\), 213–28.](#)
23. [At that time the Roman Pope could be a possible ally for the Wallachian rulers against the Turks, so that the Lutheran prototype, developed in the context of the Protestant Reformation, was unacceptable and an open criticism of the Pope inappropriate; Anita Paolicchi, "Confessional Identity and the Arts: Apocalyptic Imagery, the Pope and the Turk," in \*Voices from an Era of Transition: South Eastern Europe in the 18th Century\*, ed. Harald Heppner \(Graz: Universitätsbibliothek Graz, 2018\), 1:25–31.](#)
24. [A certain delay can be observed in comparison to similar corporative structures in Western Europe due to a later development of urban structures in Southeastern Europe.](#)

25. [Ioan Marian Țiplic, \*Bresle și arme în Transilvania \(secolele XIV–XVI\)\* \[Corporations and coats in Transylvania \(fourteenth to sixteenth centuries\)\] \(Bucharest: Editura Militară, 2009\), 44. Similar practices were commonly applied in several cities in Central and Western Europe: A topical example is the Venice “Zecca,” which was charged with the control and approval of all the precious objects made in the domains of the Venetian Republic and which had developed an articulated system of hallmarks.](#)
26. [For a selection of goldsmith and city hallmarks, see Nicolescu, \*Argintăria laică\*, 49–52.](#)
27. [Daniela Dâmboiu, \*Breasla aurarilor din Sibiu între secolele XV–XVII\* \[Goldsmiths’ guilds in Sibiu between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries\] \(Alba Iulia: Altip, 2008\), 34.](#)
28. [Teofana Matakieva-Lilkova, \*L’arte cristiana della Bulgaria\*, in \*Cristiani d’Oriente: Spiritualità, arte e potere nell’Europa post-bizantina\*, ed. Grigore Arbore Popescu \(Milan: Electa, 1999\), 103–5.](#)
29. [Anna Ballian, “Silverwork Produced in Ottoman Trikala \(Thessaly\): Problems of Taxonomy and Interpretation,” in Gerelyes and Hartmuth, \*Ottoman Metalwork in the Balkans\*, 11–35, at 15–17.](#)
30. [For example, Wallachian voivodes supported the refoundation of Koutloumousíou Monastery, two Byzantine officers from East Macedonia founded the Pantokrátoros Monastery, and the Serbian despot John Uglješa founded the Simonos Petra Monastery. In the fifteenth century, the voivode Bogdan donated a precious mantle woven in gold to the monastery of Rila \(Bulgaria\); in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Moldo-Wallachian voivode Matei Basarab and the tsarina of Russia Catherine II made rich donations to the Greek communities exiled to Italy, which, in turn, supported the Greek communities under Ottoman rule.](#)
31. [Dimitri Obolensky, \*The Byzantine Commonwealth: Eastern Europe, 500–1453\* \(London: Cardinal, 1974\).](#)
32. [The applied arts allowed for wider artistic freedom than the so-called major arts, and they can appropriately be regarded as mirrors reflecting the style of an age in a more direct and effective way. New iconographic schemes and stylistic features could be easily introduced, and new technical innovations could be experimented with in the](#)

- applied arts thanks to the adaptivity of the medium and the possibility to redo an unsatisfactory result without lowering the value of the material, offering virtually endless possibilities to the master artisan.
33. The Western European-centered point of view on Byzantine and post-Byzantine art is a topic that deserves major attention: Art historiography has transmitted from generation to generation a conceptual and operative contraposition between Western and Byzantine art, as if they were unrelated phenomena. For a notable contribution to this critical analysis of the subjectivity of the dominant art historiography in Europe and America, see Robert S. Nelson, “Living on the Byzantine Borders of Western Art,” *Gesta* 35, no. 1 (1996): 3–11.
  34. This is the heritage of the bibliography of the late Communist age of many Southeastern European countries, which was often affected by the nationalistic propaganda aimed at demonstrating the idealized existence of specific national styles, while, in fact, more definitive national styles only emerged in the nineteenth century. Furthermore, often the modern borders did not necessarily coincide with the borders of historical regions and reigns, altering the perception and the discussion.
  35. Ballian, “Silverwork Produced in Ottoman Trikala,” 14. Therefore, whenever I refer to “Balkan artisans” or “Balkan art,” this is exclusively to indicate the whole of different (but connected) artistic experiences attested to in the wide area extending from the Danube to the Greek borders.
  36. In the occasion of a conference at the Romanian Cultural Institute in Venice, I developed a tentative profile of this goldsmith based on some indications published by Cristian Luca, *Negustorimea în Țările Române, între “Societas Mercatorum” și individualitatea mercantilă, în secolele XVI–XVIII* [Trade in the Romanian Lands, between the *Societas Mercatorum* and the marchands’ individuality, sixteenth to eighteenth centuries], ed. Cristian Luca (Galați: Galați University Press, 2009), 127–44, at 136–38.
  37. Anita Paolicchi, “Ad modum turris vestre civitatis: Alcune note a partire da un turibolo commissionato da Neagoe Basarab,” *Studia historica adriatica ac danubiana* 9, nos. 1–2 (2018): 117–23.

38. [Anthony Eastmond, "Art and the Periphery," in \*The Oxford Companion to Byzantine Studies\*, eds. E. Jeffreys, R. Cormack, and J. Haldon \(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008\), 770–76.](#)

20

# LATE MEDIEVAL BALKAN DRESS BEYOND BYZANTIUM

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The effects that the political fragmentation of the late medieval Balkans and Anatolia had on Byzantium have been discussed from many different angles, from the diversity of the coinage in circulation to the rise of “aristocratic” banditry in its borderlands.<sup>1</sup> No doubt, the replacing of Byzantine hegemony by a multipolar political landscape in the wider region was a multifaceted and complex phenomenon, evident in all aspects of culture, including dress. Accordingly, we should consider the importance of the integrity of Byzantine sartorial identity in the eyes of the Byzantines themselves. Byzantine dress developed from late antique garments and was at the core of the citizens’ self-perceived Romanness.<sup>2</sup> What is more, for an empire whose dress used to act as a prototype for the other Balkan elites and whose prestigious weavings once functioned as preeminent tools of diplomacy, any dramatic changes through the infiltration of foreign imports would, at least in theory, be received in a bad light.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, another complementary point of view could also be considered equally valid: that

Byzantine dress absorbed elements from the East since the early days of the empire, with the level of infiltration varying throughout the years.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the late Byzantine appropriation of aspects of Asian and Middle Eastern dress and textiles could be conceived within the frame of a long-standing process of cross-pollination, which, at this point in time, had become manifestly less bidirectional than before. The first part of this overview will be dedicated to this aspect, focusing on elements of Mongol and Mamluk transfer as seen in the visual evidence, which are most easily traceable in late Byzantine and Balkan dress.

What is more, the Balkans experienced yet another long process of transformation that was finalized only in the second half of the fifteenth century: the gradual transition from a fragmented borderland to a peninsula that was politically integrated into the Ottoman Empire. While the Balkans retained a Christian majority, whose elite used Greek as its lingua franca, the formation of Muslim communities in its provinces have been credited with the peninsula's successful Ottomanization.<sup>5</sup> These political developments also affected the dress of the Christian elite, which became visibly Ottoman. In my view, this change need not be interpreted as a radical rupture with Byzantine heritage. If the Ottoman synthesis is broken down to its formative ingredients, then it becomes apparent that the same Central Asian and Mediterranean fashions were already present in later Byzantium.<sup>6</sup> By adopting this point of view, the Ottomanization of Christian dress could be explained as a natural progression based on asymmetrical continuities. In a way, later Byzantine eclecticism paved the way for the smooth transition to an Ottoman sartorial form, prefiguring the peak of Eastern fashions that occurred in the sixteenth century. Overall, my arguments in this chapter aim to reveal how the region's visual and material culture reflected the adaptation of foreign fashions into the local sartorial idiom. In fact, the visual sources are a credible mirror for this dynamic, especially for the later Byzantine period from which few actual material remnants survive.

## **Beyond Tradition: Central Asian and Mamluk Fashions in Late Byzantium**



Much of the scholarship dedicated to dress and textiles of the late Middle Ages treats the remarkable internationalization of style and the novel techniques that occurred after the Mongol expansion. The Mongol sartorial canon formed out of a mix of Chinese and Central Asian elements, with nomadic dress lying in its core.<sup>7</sup> These developments in fashion and costume in the territories under the Mongols occupy the forefront of research, while the tracing of their global impact is centered on Italy.<sup>8</sup> Byzantium and the Balkans have surprisingly been pushed to the margins of this discussion so far, despite their intermediary geography between the Apennine peninsula and West Asia.<sup>9</sup> In fact, the area's closeness to Asia allowed for continuous communication with Central Asia, with discernible effects on the dress of Byzantium and its neighbors, such as the Bulgarians.<sup>10</sup> Late Byzantium was marked by the preference of its aristocracy for Turko-Mongol dress, at the expense of the Roman chlamys, the sleeveless ceremonial mantle that was the standard court garment since the fourth century.<sup>11</sup> Such elements may have also appeared in the representation of Byzantine military attire.<sup>12</sup>

Byzantium probably acted as one of the intermediaries through which garments of Central Asian origin, such as the loose-sleeved *lapatza* worn by both men and women, disseminated in the Balkans.<sup>13</sup> New textile terms arose in Greek that clearly refer to weavings imported from Central Asia.<sup>14</sup> No doubt, their desirability among elite circles is related to the void created by the decline of Byzantine silk weaving, which started after the Fourth Crusade (1204).<sup>15</sup> Visual evidence points to the dissemination of Central Asian textiles or, at least, their patterns in Serbia as well. The representation of the cloth in the Brajan family portraits in the church of Annunciation in Karan is one of the few known pieces of evidence since the presence of these textiles in Serbia has not been fully assessed or even documented in scholarship thus far.<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps the most visually impressive depiction of Mongol dress in the Balkans is the portrait of Jovan Oliver Grčinić (ca. 1310–56) in the monastery of SS Archangel Michael and Hermit Gabriel of Lesnovo, which he reestablished in 1341.<sup>17</sup> Jovan Oliver was a prominent despot at the court of the Serbian Emperor Dušan the Mighty (r. 1331–55), whose origin, as the epithet Grčinić denotes, is thought to have been Greek.<sup>18</sup> His

Byzantine title further underlines the exceptionality of his status in the Serbian context.<sup>19</sup> His two portraits, one in the naos and the other in the narthex, are equally remarkable mainly for the exotic detail of the cloud collar that Jovan Oliver wears ([Figure 20.1](#)).<sup>20</sup> Despite the wide infiltration of Central Asian features in the Byzantine, and by extension Balkan, wardrobe, this accessory is quite unique in the portraits of the wider region. In fact, one would have to travel as far as Georgia in order to find similar cloud collars in the attire of Orthodox noblemen.<sup>21</sup> It has been argued that the original meaning of the cloud collar was cosmological, although, with time and mundane use, it became mere ornamentation.<sup>22</sup> The cloud motif, either as a collar or in ceramics, was popular in the realms ruled by the Mongols during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.<sup>23</sup>



[Figure 20.1 Jovan Oliver Grčinić, mural painting, 1342, Lesnovo Monastery.](#)

Source: AKG-Images / Andrea Jemolo.

It is quite interesting that roughly contemporary representations to Jovan Oliver's portrait produced in Ilkhanid Iran show courtiers also wearing the cloud collar.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, the Byzantines' thorough knowledge of Mongol dress can be detected in the representation of courtiers, perhaps from the Ilkhanid court, in another fourteenth-century mural painting in the exonarthex of Vatopedi Monastery on Mount Athos.<sup>25</sup> In my view, this directly transplanted element could be associated with the despot's exceptionality: a powerful magnate of medieval Serbia, married to Maria Palaiologina (d. 1355) in 1336, who even issued his own money.<sup>26</sup> The exoticism of his dress was perhaps meant to denote his particularly elevated status among the local notables.<sup>27</sup> Given the uniqueness of the cloud collar in late medieval Balkan aristocratic portraits, this reading seems plausible. It is as if Jovan Oliver had decided to appropriate this foreign accessory as a strategy of self-representation.

The other traceable imports pertain to weavings and clothing items attained from the Mamluk Sultanate (1250–1517), an Islamic polity that controlled Egypt and Greater Syria. If one could generalize, Mamluk dress merged the local Arab traditions with Turko-Tatar elements, reflecting both regional fashions and the regime's Central Asian origins.<sup>28</sup> The success of Mamluk fashions in Byzantium continued a tradition of interchange and imports arriving from these regions, which was already strong under the Fatimid Caliphate (909–1171).<sup>29</sup> In terms of how widely distributed these textiles were, a mention in a late twelfth- or early thirteenth-century legal document provides some evidence: a piece of Egyptian cloth, twenty yards long, is mentioned as part of the inheritance of a male orphan in Berroia, a provincial city in the hinterland of Byzantine Macedonia.<sup>30</sup> There are few surviving textile remnants attributable to either a Mamluk workshop or a transfer of ornament dating from the second half of fourteenth century or later.<sup>31</sup> Thus, for earlier evidence of the infiltration of Mamluk fashions, we need to turn to visual and textual sources.

The most debated example of this type is the mosaic donor portrait of the statesman Theodore Metochites (1270–1332), in the Chora Church in Constantinople, dateable sometime before the Easter of 1321.<sup>32</sup> The portrait appears to be quite idiosyncratic for multiple reasons, one being the pose of Metochites, kneeling and offering the church's model to Christ.<sup>33</sup> Of interest

to our discussion is his impressive turban-like headdress. As Maria Parani notes, this headdress resists easy classification according to the Byzantine sartorial canon. The closest parallel to its shape is found in a Mamluk military headdress, which was padded to appear as voluminous as the one resting on Metochites's head.<sup>34</sup> The importance of Metochites in the political scene of the time, as well as the centrality of the Chora Church in the religious landscape of Palaiologan Constantinople, point to an exceptional visualization of the developments in metropolitan Byzantine dress. Given that Metochites was known for his distaste for the Mamluk-Byzantine alliance, it seems that personal views did not always play a leading role in the adoption of visibly foreign fashions.<sup>35</sup>

The church of Taxiarchis Mitropoleos in the city of Kastoria offers a comparable example of the Mamluk infiltration into provincial dress. The church's earlier paintings are dated to the ninth to tenth centuries on stylistic grounds. However, its later paintings are firmly dated by an inscription to 1359–60, years that coincide with the period of Serbian rule over the city.<sup>36</sup> Of interest to our discussion is the portrait of a female aristocrat in supplication, with her hands extended toward Christ ([Figure 20.2](#)).<sup>37</sup> Her outer garment is decorated with “diamonds” filled with vegetal and other indiscernible ornament. The textile's dark blue/green and white palette, as well as its overall pattern, recall Mamluk woven textiles and embroideries of the period. One of these textiles, attributed to the late fourteenth century, is in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago: it features a blue satin ground with a white pattern of “diamonds” and “crosses,” reminiscent of what the painter seems to represent in Kastoria ([Figure 20.3](#)).<sup>38</sup>





*Figure 20.2* [Female aristocrat in supplication, mural painting, ca. 1439, church of Taxiarches Mitropoleos, Kastoria.](#)

Source: Ephorate of antiquities of Kastoria, Hellenic Ministry of Culture.



[Figure 20.3](#) [Textile fragment, Mamluk workshop, lampas weave, silk, late fourteenth century, Art Institute of Chicago, Grace R. Smith textile endowment, inv. no. 1983.747.](#)

*Source:* Art Institute of Chicago.

Efthymios Tsigaridas dates the mural to 1439, the year that the other aristocrat represented—Manuel, son of Michael, Mousake, Moustake, or Mouzaki—is known to have died.<sup>39</sup> A very similar textile is also depicted in an earlier donor portrait, dated to 1414 by an inscription, in the church of St. Paraskevi in Monodendri: an unnamed lady of the provincial aristocratic

Therianos family, perhaps its matriarch, is depicted wearing a dark blue/green outer garment decorated with “diamonds” that are filled with vegetal and other indiscernible ornament.<sup>40</sup> These two examples prove that this aesthetic had become an important social and cultural currency in the provinces as well. It is also interesting to note that the Byzantines perhaps shared with the Mamluks a love for darker blue and green tones.<sup>41</sup> For the Mamluks, this preference is foremost attested by the many extant textile remnants themselves.<sup>42</sup> For the Byzantines, we need to rely on representations of dress, some of which, like the ones in discussion, can be considered realistic depictions of contemporary garb.

The different regimes under which these two paintings were made allows us to put these imports into perspective: Monodendri, like the rest of Epirus, was still ruled by Carlo I Tocco (d. 1429), while Kastoria was already in the hands of the Ottomans sometime in the late fourteenth century.<sup>43</sup> The commonality of certain aspects of material culture was clearly not infringed upon by the administrative fragmentation of the continental Balkans at the time. Despite political instability, fluid and universal aesthetics seem to have been a key aspect of local cultures. Alternatively, there was a borderland character of dress in these lands outside the core empire, which was visibly marked by eclecticism.<sup>44</sup> It is also possible that, as with the Mongol elements, Byzantium acted as a prime mediator of the Mamluk elements spreading in the Balkans at the time, especially given its close ties to the sultanate.

### **Transition: Ottoman Sartorial Forms**

The Ottoman conquest of the Balkans had multiple effects on the local culture, with the material results of this shift being among the most obvious or pronounced. Much of scholarship has strived to trace continuities between Christian artistic production before and after the Ottoman conquest, a quest that has nurtured the creation of post-Byzantine studies, a field that, until recently, kept itself almost entirely separate from Ottoman studies.<sup>45</sup> While the post-Byzantine concept may be best applied in the case of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Christian painting, it seems that other aspects of material culture, such as dress and the minor arts, were much



more problematic. For example, abundant direct and indirect evidence indicates that, as early as the sixteenth century, the Greek Orthodox community had started to adopt different components of Ottoman sartorial identity.<sup>46</sup>

In this process, the Church, especially the patriarchate of Constantinople, played a central role. First, the textual sources reveal that the members of the high clergy received robes of honor (*hil'at*) upon their confirmation by an Ottoman authority.<sup>47</sup> These ceremonies paradoxically signaled the Church's submission and temporal power at the same time, underlining the institution's complex relationship with the Ottomans. In the Ottoman tradition, the robe of honor was a long-sleeved *surcaftan*, recalling, to a certain extent, the Byzantine *lapatza*, although the two garments have not been systematically compared until now.<sup>48</sup>

However, the effect of Ottoman fashions on ecclesiastical vestments is far more traceable in the textiles used for garments than in their tailoring and cut.<sup>49</sup> Ottoman textiles were the first preference of the clergy, compared in popularity only to Italian textiles.<sup>50</sup> The Church adopted even the boldest and most emblematic Ottoman designs, such as the medium- and large-scale triple spheres, sometimes called *çintamani* in art-historical scholarship ([Figure 20.4](#)).<sup>51</sup> The embracing of this visual language functioned on two intertwined levels: first, it denoted the Church's position in the social ladder, and second, it constituted the fabric's de facto sacralization. The latter aspect is reflected in the representation of dress in religious painting, as well as the transmedial transfer of ornament, which was used in the Church as a “frame” for the religious narrative.<sup>52</sup> The proliferation of relevant textile and visual remnants in sixteenth-century Greece reveals how fast these imports turned native, spreading from Ottoman Constantinople, the period's preeminent cultural center, to the provinces, where Christians remained in the majority. Besides the social and political reasons that motivated and accelerated these processes, it should also be noted that many of the artistic traditions that were blended into the Ottoman decorative vocabulary were already present in the Balkans, although not in the perfect synthesis that emerged in the sixteenth century.<sup>53</sup>



[Figure 20.4 Sticherion \(detail\), Ottoman workshop, lampas weave, silk and silver thread, sixteenth century, Treasury of the monastery of the Great Meteoron.](#)

*Source:* Monastery of the Great Meteoron; Christos Galazios.

Even the pattern of the triple spheres, so celebrated in imperial art, was already pervasive in fourteenth-century paintings in the Balkans, often included in representations of dress.<sup>54</sup> This inclusion reveals that the relatively smooth adoption of an Ottoman sartorial identity was the expression of asymmetrical continuity. Ottoman aesthetics were, after all, a synthesis of elements that already circulated in the Balkans and Anatolia/Asia Minor, effectively pushing regional taste and style in certain directions, such as the preference for aniconic motifs to convey power. At the same time, the results produced by this dynamic were more homogenous and left less space for ad hoc sartorial choices, which had been

evident previously. Another aspect reinforcing this reading is also the anemic, if any, criticism of the sartorial transition, which sharply contrasts with the reactions against foreign fashions often expressed in Byzantium.<sup>55</sup> Finally, unlike the ecclesiastical wardrobe, it seems that secular garments worn by Christian notables followed Ottoman fashions even in the way they were cut. Donor portraits in churches reveal that the local aristocracy began to adopt Ottoman-style garments. Representative of this dynamic are the portraits of Panos Arseniou and Panos Papadimitriou in the church of Agioi Apostoloi in the village of Dipalitsa/Molybdoskepastos ([Figure 20.5](#)). The church was originally founded in 1537/38 by Arseniou, and the second phase of its decoration was finished in 1645 by Papadimitriou; thus, the dual donor portrait most likely dates to the seventeenth century. The *ktetors*' Ottoman-style caftans and headdresses, as well as their titles, signal an association with the Danubian principalities.<sup>56</sup>



[Figure 20.5](#) [Panos Arseniou and Panos Papadimitriou, mural painting, ca. 1645, church of Agioi Apostoloi, Dipalitsa/Molybdoskepastos.](#)

*Source:* Ephorate of antiquities of Ioannina, Hellenic Ministry of Culture.

In the greater scheme of things, another branch of this process was the dissemination of the same aesthetic to the north, in lands that encompass modern Romania. Complex contacts with the Ottomans extended in the Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia from the fifteenth century onward, which may have informed sartorial choices. This status quo continued until 1711, when the so-called Phanariote regime brought about tighter Ottoman control and led to new resonances in local elite culture.<sup>57</sup> In theory, the pathway toward the Ottomanization of dress in Wallachia and Moldavia was not as straightforward as in Anatolia and Greece, the two regions that fell under Ottoman rule quite early. This is mainly because Ottoman textiles and garments were part of elite material culture in the wider region already in the sixteenth century.<sup>58</sup> The regional networks of trade and culture guaranteed the dissemination of an exotic Ottoman aesthetic even in borderland areas of the Balkans, such as Croatia.<sup>59</sup> Indicative of this tendency is the survival of relevant remnants in Romanian museums and monastic sacristies.<sup>60</sup> For example, the sacristy of Sucevița Monastery holds ecclesial vestments made of silk fabrics and embroideries that are representative of the Ottoman floral style ([Figure 20.6](#)). Their compositions are based on large tulips, carnations, and pomegranates, that is to say, generically secular designs that would have been suitable for garments used outside of church as well.<sup>61</sup> I suggest that the religious use of such textile indicates the integration of Ottoman elements since we saw this overlap between ecclesiastical and secular dress early on in the northern Balkans, including Greece.



[Figure 20.6 Liturgical vestment, embroidery and woven fabrics, 1614, Sucevița Monastery.](#)

Source: Sucevița Monastery.

Later, especially under the Phanariote regime, Ottoman fashions became a tool for the projection of identity in the hands of the upper classes. The willingness of the Wallachian and Moldavian elite to associate with Ottoman material culture is particularly informative since, for these Balkan people, the Ottomans became equated to Greek.<sup>62</sup> Thus, it seems that Greek

intermediation of the Ottoman visual language found resonance in a region that was already well-acquainted with it.

## **Conclusion: Dress and Identity from Late Byzantium to the Ottomans**

The Balkans constituted a fragmented and unstable borderland between Europe and Asia during the late Middle Ages, with power dynamics unfolding even at an intrastate level. Jovan Oliver is the perfect example of this reality: a powerful magnate of the Serbian state who enjoyed an increased level of autonomy in the management of his affairs and estate. The period's instability and multipolarity facilitated the enrichment of court sartorial identity with imports from East and West. Byzantine dress undoubtedly continued to be an important paradigm for the Balkan courts, where Orthodox aristocrats followed and imitated Byzantine styles to underscore their claims of legitimization. But imports from Central Asia and Egypt were quite important in Constantinople itself. It is hard to speculate, at least with our current level of knowledge, whether these Eastern fashions spread in the Balkans via Byzantium or via the long-distance and regional networks that inspired the scholarly trend of the Global Middle Ages. In fact, this phenomenon was not new; middle Byzantine, Bulgarian, and other Balkan dress codes had long owed much to Central Asia. What changed at this time was the intensity of the outside influence and the ad hoc eclecticism seen in depictions of Jovan Oliver and Theodore Metochites, who both belonged in the same milieu of exceptionality.<sup>63</sup> Regardless of these aristocrats' political ideologies, their exotic sartorial choices could be interpreted as means to project their elevated status to society.

In the case of the Ottoman Balkans, the transition again functioned at different levels. First, the imperial aesthetic synthesized pretty much the same elements that were in wide circulation since the fourteenth century. In that respect, this transition depended on asymmetrical continuities directed by the new central and heterodox authority installed in Constantinople. At the same time, the alignment with this aesthetic by the clergy and by notable figures denoted their exceptionality in the Ottoman context, acting

as a useful complement to their claims of Byzantine heritage. The visual sources, mainly religious painting, further reveal a complex reality in which the social, the political, and the religious intertwined. Thus, dress and textiles that are supposed to be foreign to Byzantine traditions are employed to denote an institution's or person's exceptionality. This again feeds into the aforementioned notion of continuity. Finally, as the fragmentation of the Balkans gradually receded while the Ottoman expansion progressed, it cannot be claimed that the region's in-betweenness was altogether removed or that its borders ceased to exist. The persistence of the Italian imports, especially in material culture, provides a more complex picture, as does the borderland culture prevailing in the Danubian Principalities. There, the elite's Ottomanization will be completed via a Greek or Hellenized Greek Orthodox intermediary, leading to the adoption of Constantinopolitan fashions, both sumptuous and eclectic.

## Notes

1. [On coins, see, e.g., Julian Baker, "Coin Circulation in Fourteenth-Century Thrace and Constantinople According to the Evidence of the Hoards," in \*Second International Congress on the History of Money and Numismatics in the Mediterranean World, 5–8 January 2017, Antalya: Proceedings\*, ed. Oğuz Tekin \(Antalya: Koç University Suna & İnan Kırac Research Center for Mediterranean Civilizations, 2018\), 485–504. On banditry, see Elena Gkartzonika, "Banditry and the Clash of Powers in 14th-Century Thrace: Momčilo and His Fragmented Memory," \*Bulgaria Mediaevalis, an International Journal for Medieval Bulgarian and Byzantine Studies\* 3 \(2012\): 511–50.](#)
2. [Jennifer L. Ball, \*Byzantine Dress: Representations of Secular Dress in Eighth- to Twelfth-Century Painting\* \(New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005\), 6 and different passages in 12–56. For an overall treatment of the subject, see Anthony Kaldellis, "Ethnicity and Clothing in Byzantium," in \*Identity and the Other in Byzantium: Papers from the Fourth International Sevgi Gönül Byzantine Studies Symposium\*, eds. Koray Durak and Ivana Jevtić \(Istanbul: Koç University Stavros](#)

- [Niarchos Foundation Center for Antique and Byzantine Studies, 2019\), 41–52.](#)
3. [See, e.g., on the Bulgarian elite's appropriation of Byzantine court dress, Liliana V. Simeonova, "The 'Avar Costume' versus the Skaramangion: Symbolism of the Male Aristocratic Dress in Bulgaria, Ninth–Tenth Centuries," in \*State and Church: Studies in Medieval Bulgaria and Byzantium\*, eds. Vassil Gjuzelev and Kiril Petkov \(Sofia: American Research Center in Sofia, 2011\), 129–56, at 138–48. See also Anna Muthesius, "Silken Diplomacy," in \*Byzantine Diplomacy: Papers from the Twenty-Fourth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Cambridge, March 1990\*, eds. Jonathan Shepard and Simon Franklin \(Aldershot: Variorum, 1992\), 237–48.](#)
  4. [On the contribution of Eastern fashions to the development of Byzantine court dress, see Timothy Dawson, "Oriental Costumes at the Byzantine Court: A Reassessment," \*Byzantion, Revue Internationale des Études Byzantines\* 76 \(2006\): 97–114; Maria G. Parani, "Cultural Identity and Dress: The Case of Late Byzantine Ceremonial Costume," \*Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik\* 57 \(2007\): 95–135, at 106–26. Also see Nikolai P. Kondakov, "Costumes Orientaux à la Cour Byzantine," \*Byzantion, Revue Internationale des Études Byzantines\* 1 \(1924\): 7–49.](#)
  5. [See Michał Wasiucionek, "Greek as Ottoman? Language, Identity and Mediation of Ottoman Culture in the Early Modern Period," \*Cyber Review of Modern Historiography\* 21 \(2017–18\): 70–89; Nikolay Antov, \*The Ottoman "Wild West": The Balkan Frontier in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries\* \(Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017\), 14–40.](#)
  6. [On the emergence of the Ottoman classical floral style in textiles, see Walter B. Denny and Sumru Belger Krody, \*The Sultan's Garden: The Blossoming of Ottoman Art\* \(Washington, DC: Textile Museum, 2012\), 21–27.](#)
  7. [Besides the aforementioned Chinese and nomadic Central Asian elements, one should also consider that Mongol fashions merged with local Iranian traditions in the Ilkhanate. Given that the Ilkhanate was the Mongol polity closest to Byzantium, and perhaps the most influential in terms of textile culture, one would expect that it played](#)



- an important role in the processes of transfer. On the formation of Mongol dress, see Eiren L. Shea, *Mongol Court Dress, Identity Formation, and Global Exchange* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 7–40. On the formation of Ilkhanid dress, see *ibid.*, 96–122.
8. Scholarship on the subject is quite prolific: Mariachiara Gasparini, *Transcending Patterns: Silk Road Cultural and Artistic Interactions through Central Asian Textile Images* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2020), 126–67; Shea, *Mongol Court Dress*, 122–45.
  9. For a preliminary assessment of the Mongol element in later Byzantine art and material culture, see Nikolaos Vryzidis, “The Archaeology of Intermediation: Prolegomena on Mongol Elements in Later Byzantine Art and Material Culture,” *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Asian Interactions*, 22 (2023), forthcoming.
  10. On the Bulgarian appropriation of Avar costume, see, e.g., Simeonova, “Avar Costume,” 131–38.
  11. On the chlamys, see Parani, “Cultural Identity and Dress,” 99–105; Ball, *Byzantine Dress*, 29–35. On the prevalence of Turko-Mongol fashions, see Parani, “Cultural Identity and Dress,” 106–26.
  12. Maria G. Parani, *Reconstructing the Reality of Images: Byzantine Material Culture and Religious Iconography (11th–15th Centuries)* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), at 116–17 and pls. 132–33.
  13. On the *lapatza*, see Branislav Cvetković, “Прилог проучавашу византијског дворског костима—*γρανάτζα, λαπάτζας*” [Contribution to the study of Byzantine court dress—*granatza, lapatzas*], *Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta* 34 (1995): 143–56; Parani, “Cultural Identity and Dress,” 106. On its dissemination, see Cvetković, “Прилог проучавашу”; Tatjana Vuleta, “Изван Вашара Таштине: Византијски Дворски Лапаџас И Његова Употреба На Двору Српског Краља Стефана Дечанског” [Beyond the vanity fair: Byzantine court *lapatzas* and its use at the court of the Serbian king Stefan Dečanski], *Patrimonium.MK* 19 (2021): 243–62.
  14. Dimitri Theodoridis, “Κυλιχάρτια: Ein mongolischer Stoffname chinesischen Ursprunges,” *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 52 (2002): 249–57; Rustam Shukurov, *The Byzantine Turks, 1204–1461* (Leiden: Brill 2016), 313–14 and 407–8.

15. [David Jacoby, “Late Byzantium between the Mediterranean and Asia: Trade and Material Culture,” in \*Byzantium: Faith and Power \(1261–1557\): Perspectives on Late Byzantine Art and Culture\*, ed. Sarah T. Brooks \(New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art and Yale University Press, 2006\), 20–41, at 24.](#)
16. [On the eclecticism in the garments of the Brajan family present see Tatjana Vuleta, “Страни елементи у одежду Каранских Ктитора—Отисак Света Као Симбол Етноса, I Део” \[Foreign elements of ktetor attire in Karan—The mark of the world as a symbol of ethnos\], \*Patrimonium.MK\* 16 \(2018\): 223–42; 17 \(2019\): 135–62.](#)
17. [On the subject, also see Vryzidis, “The Archaeology of Intermediation,” forthcoming.](#)
18. [John V. A. Fine Jr., \*The Late Medieval Balkans: A Critical Survey from the Late Twelfth Century to the Ottoman Conquest\* \(Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1994\), 298.](#)
19. [Srđan Pirivatrić, “Византијске Титуле Јована Оливера: Прилог Истраживању Проблема Њиховог Порекла И Хронологије” \[The Byzantine titles of Jovan Oliver: A contribution to the issues of their origin and chronology\], \*Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta\* 50, no. 2 \(2013\): 713–24.](#)
20. [Tatjana Vuleta, “Лесновске Облак-Крагне” \[The cloud collars from Lesnovo\], \*Patrimonium\* 7 \(2014\): 157–84; Vladimir Aleksić and Mariachiara Gasparini, “The ‘Mongol’ Cloud Collar of the Serbian Despot John Oliver: An Historical and Iconographic Investigation,” \*Journal of Transcultural Studies\* 12, no. 1 \(2021\): 1–30.](#)
21. [Vuleta, “Облак-Крагне,” fig. 23.](#)
22. [Schuyler Cammann, “The Symbolism of the Cloud Collar Motif,” \*Art Bulletin\* 33, no. 1 \(1951\): 1–9. See also Aleksić and Gasparini, “‘Mongol’ Cloud Collar,” 13–21.](#)
23. [Shea, \*Mongol Court Dress\*, 52–53, 79, 88, 101, 104–5.](#)
24. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, pl. 25.](#)
25. [Parani, \*Reconstructing the Reality\*, 92–93; Paschalis Androudis, “Αραβουργηματικές διακοσμήσεις και επιδράσεις της ισλαμικής τέχνης στην παλαιολόγια τέχνη της Μακεδονίας” \[Arabesque decorations and influences of Islamic art in the Palaiologan art of Macedonia\], \*Γ’ Επιστημονικό Συμπόσιο “Βυζαντινή Μακεδονία”:\*](#)

- [Θεολογία—Ιστορία—Φιλολογία—Δίκαιο—Αρχαιολογία—Τέχνη, 14–15 Μαΐου 2016 Θεσσαλονίκη \[3rd Scientific symposium “Byzantine Macedonia”: Theology—History—Philology—Law—Archaeology—Art, 14–15 May 2016, Thessaloniki\] \(Thessaloniki: Society for Macedonian Studies, 2019\), 771–93, at 778; Vryzidis, “The Archaeology of Intermediation,” forthcoming.](#)
26. [Tatjana Vuleta was the first to propose this, although her ascribing of religious meaning to the collars goes beyond my personal understanding of the transplant process \(Vuleta, “Облак-Крагне,” 157–84\).](#)
27. [Fine, \*Late Medieval Balkans\*, 298–300.](#)
28. [On Mamluk dress, see Leo A. Meyer, \*Mamluk Costume: A Survey\* \(Geneva: Albert Kundig, 1952\); Doris Behrens-Abouseif, \*Dress and Dress Code in Medieval Cairo: A Mamluk Obsession\* \(Leiden: Brill, 2024\).](#)
29. [See Marielle Martiniani-Reber, “Quelques aspects des relations entre productions textiles byzantine et arabe aux Xe–XIe siècles,” in \*The Hidden Life of Textiles in the Medieval and Early Modern Mediterranean: Contexts and Cross-Cultural Encounters in the Islamic, Latinate and Eastern Christian Worlds\*, ed. Nikolaos Vryzidis \(Turnhout: Brepols, 2020\), 185–204.](#)
30. [Maria G. Parani, “Intercultural Exchange in the Field of Material Culture in the Eastern Mediterranean: The Evidence of Byzantine Legal Documents \(11th to 15th Centuries\),” in \*Diplomatics in the Eastern Mediterranean 1000–1500: Aspects of Cross-Cultural Communication\*, eds. Alexander Beihammer, Maria Parani, and Chris Schabel \(Boston: Brill, 2008\), 349–72, at 360.](#)
31. [Nikolaos Vryzidis, “The ‘Arabic’ Stole of Vatopediou Monastery: Traces of Islamic Material Culture in Later Byzantium,” \*Muqarnas: An Annual on the Visual Cultures of the Islamic World\* 36 \(2019\): 85–99; Nikolaos Vryzidis, “Between Three Worlds: The ‘Veneto-Saracenic’ Candleholder of Docheiariou Monastery,” \*Convivium-Exchanges and Interactions in the Arts of Medieval Europe, Byzantium, and the Mediterranean\* 7, no. 2 \(2020\): 58–73, fig. 7.](#)
32. [Nancy Ševčenko, “The Portrait of Theodore Metochites at Chora,” in \*Donations et Donateurs dans le monde byzantin: Actes du colloque\*](#)

- international de l'Université de Fribourg (Fribourg 13–15 mars 2008)*, eds. Jean-Michel Spieser and Elisabeth Yota (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2012), 189–205, at 191. For a recent discussion of Metochites's refoundation of the Chora and an earlier date (before 1317) for its completion, also see Kostis Smyrlis, "Contextualizing Theodore Metochites and his Refoundation of Chora," *Revue des Études Byzantines* 80 (2022), 69–111.
33. This combination is considered unique. Such portraits feature the donor either kneeling/supplicating or with an offering in his or her hands (Ševčenko, "Portrait of Theodore Metochites," 192).
  34. Parani, *Reconstructing the Reality of Images*, 70; Parani, "Cultural Identity and Dress," 109.
  35. Vryzidis, "'Arabic' Stole," 90. Also see Parani, "Cultural Identity and Dress," 112–16.
  36. E. N. Tsigaridas, *Καστοριά: Κέντρο ζωγραφικής την εποχή των Παλαιολόγων (1360–1450)* [Kastoria: Center of painting during the Palaiologan era (1360–1450)] (Thessaloniki: Society for Macedonian Studies, 2019), 30.
  37. Note: *Ibid.*, 59–60.
  38. The slight asymmetry of the "diamonds" possibly denotes the representation of embroidery. For geometric patterns filled with vegetal motifs in blue/green and white/beige, see Christa C. Mayer Thurman, "Some Major Textile Acquisitions from Europe and Egypt," *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 11, no. 1 (1984): 52–69, at 55; Maria Sardi, "Foreign Influences in Mamluk Textiles: The Formation of a New Aesthetic," in *The Hidden Life of Textiles in the Medieval and Early Modern Mediterranean: Contexts and Cross-Cultural Encounters in the Islamic, Latinate and Eastern Christian Worlds*, ed. Nikolaos Vryzidis (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 83–118, at 90–91, fig. 10. Intricate geometric motifs rendered in blue and white are also found in a fifteenth-century embroidery sampler in Cambridge's Fitzwilliam Museum, attributed to Mamluk artisans (inv. no. T.166–1946). For more Mamluk embroideries in the Ashmolean Museum, some of which feature similar motifs and comparable blue-and-white palettes, see Marianne Ellis, *Embroideries and Samplers*

- from Islamic Egypt* (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum; Greenville, SC: Curious Works, 2001).
39. Tsigaridas, *Καστοριά, Κέντρο ζωγραφικής*, 57–59.
  40. Note: *Ibid.*, fig. 417.
  41. This argument has been brought forward by Dimitris Loupis and Maria Sardi in conference presentations and lectures. However, to my knowledge, there is no publication on the subject yet.
  42. For Mamluk textiles in which dark blue and green are the dominant colors, see Louise W. Mackie, *Symbols of Power: Luxury Textiles from Islamic Lands, 7th–21st Century* (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), figs. 7.16, 7.28–7.31, 7.33, 7.35–7.38. Also see Louise W. Mackie, “Toward an Understanding of Mamluk Silks: National and International Considerations,” *Muqarnas* 2 (1984): 127–46, at 128.
  43. Before its conquest by the Ottomans, Kastoria was controlled by the Christian Albanian Mouzakes family, which took over its rule from the Serbs.
  44. It should be noted that eclecticism in the dress of Byzantine borderlands was not a new phenomenon. During the Middle Byzantine period, this category included not only Cappadocia but Kastoria as well (Ball, *Byzantine Dress*, 57–77). As already noted, the new element is the phenomenon's intensity during the later Byzantine period.
  45. On the use of the term “post-Byzantine,” see Henry Schilb, “‘Byzance après Byzance’ and Post-Byzantine Art from the Late Fifteenth Century through the Eighteenth Century,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Art and Architecture*, ed. Ellen C. Schwartz (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 255–70.
  46. One cannot rule out that the effects of the Ottoman conquest on dress were evident already in the fifteenth century. However, the transitional character of the specific period, as well as the scarce evidence, do not allow for safe conclusions.
  47. Nikolaos Vryzidis, “Towards a History of the Greek *hil'at*: An Interweaving of Byzantine and Ottoman Traditions,” *Convivium-Exchanges and Interactions in the Arts of Medieval Europe, Byzantium, and the Mediterranean* 4, no. 2 (2017): 176–91; Nikolaos

- [Vryzidsi, “Textiles and Ceremonial of the Greek Orthodox Church under the Ottomans: New Evidence on \*Hil'ats\*, \*Kaftans\*, \*Covers\*, and \*Hangings\*,” \*Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association\* 6, no. 1 \(2019\): 61–80, at 61–71.](#)
48. [For the prestige that the long sleeves of the Ottoman robe conveyed, see Amanda Phillips, “Ottoman \*Hil'at\*: Between Commodity and Charisma,” in \*Frontiers of the Ottoman Imagination Studies in Honour of Rhoads Murphey\*, ed. Marios Hadjianastasis \(Leiden: Brill, 2015\), 111–38, at 124–25.](#)
49. [For a comparison between the shapes of Ottoman caftans and \*sakkoi\*, a preeminent dalmatic-shaped vestment worn by the Greek Orthodox high clergy, see Christos Karydis, \*The Orthodox Christian Sakkos: Ecclesiastical Garments Dating from the 15th to the 20th Centuries from the Holy Mountain of Athos; Collection Survey, Scientific Analysis and Preventive Conservation\* \(Oxford: Archaeopress, 2010\), 88–89. The subject is by no means exhausted.](#)
50. [See Nikolaos Vryzidis, “Ottoman Textiles and Greek Clerical Vestments: Prolegomena on a Neglected Aspect of Ecclesiastical Material Culture,” \*Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies\* 42, no. 1 \(2018\): 92–114; Nikolaos Vryzidis and Elena Papastavrou, “Italian and Ottoman Textiles in Greek Sacristies: Parallels and Fusions,” in \*15th International Congress of Turkish Art Naples, Università di Napoli “L’Orientale” 16–18 September 2015, Proceedings\*, eds. Michele Bernardini, Alessandro Taddei, and Michael Douglas Sheridan \(Ankara: Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2018\), 677–87.](#)
51. [Nikolaos Vryzidis, “Recreating a Society's Material Culture: Textiles in the Trikke Codex EBE 1471,” \*Analecta Stagorum et Meteororum\* 1 \(2022\): 301–57, at 309–10, fig. 3.](#)
52. [Christos Merantzias, “Le tissu de soie comme représentation culturelle: Le cas de la peinture monumentale post-Byzantine dans la Grèce du Nord-Ouest,” \*Bulletin du CIETA\* 83 \(2006\): 6–21; Christos Merantzias, “Ottoman Textiles within an Ecclesiastical Context: Cultural Osmoses in Mainland Greece,” in \*The Mercantile Effect Art and Exchange in the Islamate World during the 17th and 18th Centuries\*, eds. Sussan Babaie and Melanie Gibson \(London: Gingko Library, 2017\), 96–107.](#)

53. [Ottoman art blended Central Asian, Mamluk, and Italian elements to create a new and distinctive style. As previously stated, Central Asian, Mamluk, and Italian textiles were part of the eclectic later Byzantine material culture. For Italian textiles in later Byzantium, see Nikolaos Vryzidis, “Reflections of Mediterraneanism on a Church Practice: The Case of Greek Textile Bindings,” in \*Arte y producción textil en el Mediterráneo medieval\*, eds. Laura Rodríguez Peinado and Francisco de Asís García García \(Madrid: Ediciones Polifemo, 2019\), 107–33, at 115–19.](#)
54. [Scott Redford, “Byzantium and the Islamic World, 1261–1557,” in \*Byzantium: Faith and Power \(1261–1557\)\*, ed. Helen C. Evans \(New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004\), 388–96, at 393–94.](#)
55. [Jacoby, “Late Byzantium”, 28; Kaldellis, “Ethnicity and Clothing,” 51–52; Androudis, “Αρβουρρηματικές διακοσμήσεις,” 779.](#)
56. [Christos Stavrakos, “Donors, Patrons, and Benefactors in Medieval Epirus between the Great Empires: A Society in Change or Continuity?,” in \*Eclecticism in Late Medieval Visual Culture at the Crossroads of the Latin, Greek, and Slavic Traditions\*, eds. Maria Alessia Rossi and Alice Isabella Sullivan \(Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022\), 291–314, at 306–7.](#)
57. [The term “Phanariot” refers to the appointment of Greek Orthodox notables, who came from the patriarchal court of Phanari/Fener, as the princes governing Wallachia and Moldavia on behalf of the Sublime Porte. See Constantin Iordachi, “The Phanariot Regime in the Romanian Principalities, 1711/1716–1821,” in \*The Routledge Handbook of Balkan and Southeast European History\*, eds. John R. Lampe and Ulf Brunnbauer \(London: Routledge, 2020\), 35–41.](#)
58. [Constanța Vintilă, Giulia Calvi, Mária Pakucs-Willcocks, Nicoleta Roman, and Michał Wasiucionek, \*Lux, modă și alte bagatele politicești în Europa de Sud-Est, în secolele XVI–XIX\* \[Luxury, Fashion and Other Political Bagatelles in Southeastern Europe, Sixteenth–Nineteenth Centuries\] \(Bucharest: Editura Humanitas, 2021\), fig. on page 19; Mária Pakucs-Willcocks, “‘Turkish’ Textiles in South-Eastern and East-Central Europe in the Early Modern Period: The Evidence of Transylvanian Customs Accounts,” \*Journal of Early Modern History\*](#)

- [24, nos. 4–5 \(2020\): 363–82; Mária Pakucs-Willcocks, “Demand and Consumption: Sibiu and the ‘Turkish’ Products in the Sixteenth Century,” in \*Au Nord ou Sud du Danube: Dynamiques politiques, sociales et religieuses dans le passé\* \[North and south of the Danube: Political, social and religious aspects of the past\], eds. Snezhana Rakova and Gheorghe Lazăr \(Brăila: Editura Istros, Muzeul Brăilei “Carol I,” 2019\), 91–104. Also see Adam Jasienski, “A Savage Magnificence: Ottomanizing Fashion and the Politics of Display in Early Modern East-Central Europe,” \*Muqarnas: An Annual on the Visual Culture of the Islamic World\* 31 \(2014\): 173–205.](#)
59. [Silvija Banić, “Ottoman Silks Preserved on Liturgical Vestments in Croatia,” paper presented at the 15th International Congress of Turkish Art, Università degli Studi di Napoli “L’Orientale,” Naples, 17 September 2015.](#)
60. [For a discussion on the use of Ottoman silk fabrics by the Orthodox Church in the northern Balkans, see Verena Han, “Turski počasni kaftan u službi hrišćanske liturgije na Balkanu \(XVI–XVII vek\)” \[Turkish festal caftan in the service of Christian liturgy in the Balkans \(XVI–XVII centuries\)\], \*Gradska kultura na Balkanu \(XV–XIX vek\)\*, vol. 1, \*Zbornik radova\* \(Belgrade: Institute for Balkans Studies, Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 1984\), 1:275–89.](#)
61. [Maria Magdalena Székely. “Pe urmele vechilor odoare ale Mănăstirii Solca,” \*Analele Putnei\* 11, no. 1 \(2015\): 287–320, at figs. 4, 5, 7–9.](#)
62. [Michał Wasiucionek, “Conceptualizing Moldavian Otomanness: Elite Culture and Ottomanization of the Seventeenth-Century Moldavian Boyars,” \*Medieval and Early Modern Studies for Central and Eastern Europe\* 8 \(2016\): 39–78; Michał Wasiucionek, “Silk and Stones: Fountains, Painted Kaftans, and Ottomans in Early Modern Moldavia and Wallachia,” \*Revista Istorică\* 29, nos. 1–2 \(2018\): 33–54; Michał Wasiucionek, “Garments, Signatures, and Ottoman Self-Fashioning in the Imperial Periphery: Moldavian Voyvode Ștefan Tomșa II and Ottomanization in the Early Seventeenth Century,” \*Journal of Early Modern History\* 24, nos. 4–5 \(2020\): 317–40. Also see Constanța Vintilă, “Shawls and Sable Furs: How to Be a Boyar under the Phanariot Regime \(1710–1821\),” \*European History Yearbook/Jahrbuch für europäische Geschichte\* 20 \(2019\): 137–58.](#)



63. Metochites was Jovan Oliver's maternal grandfather.

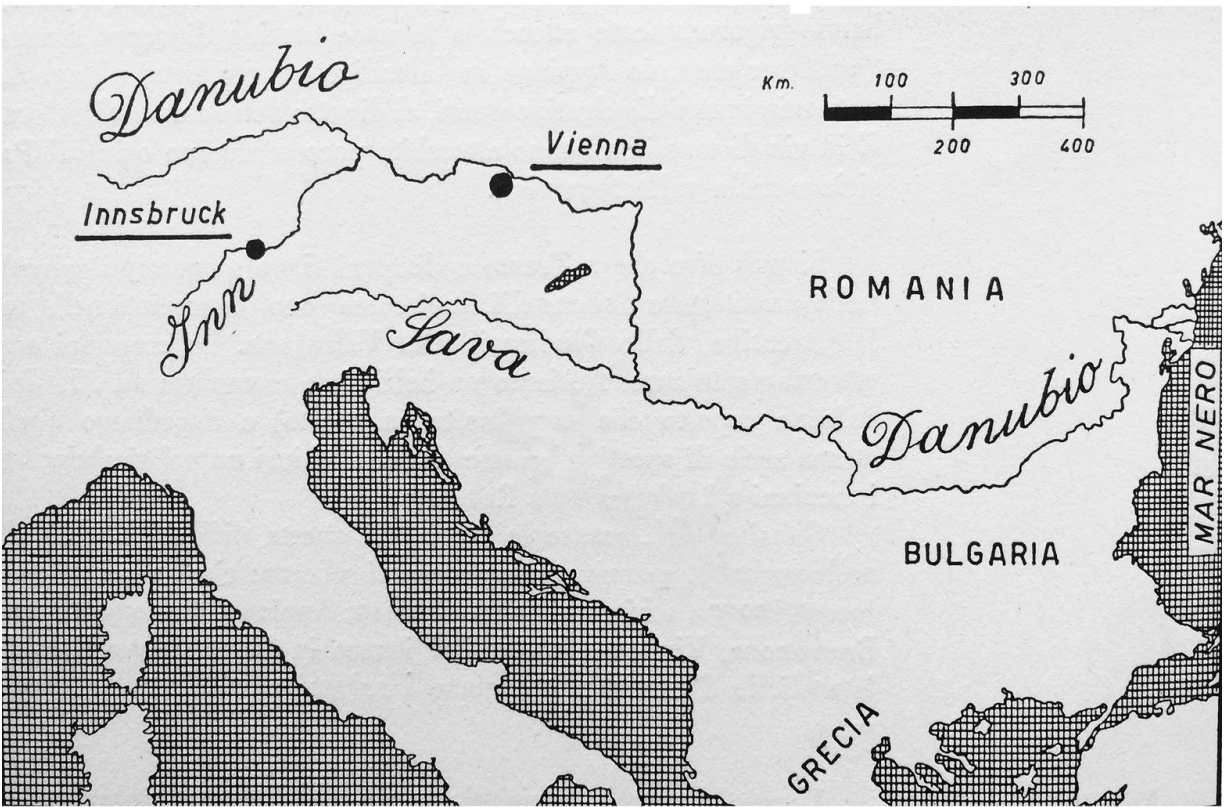
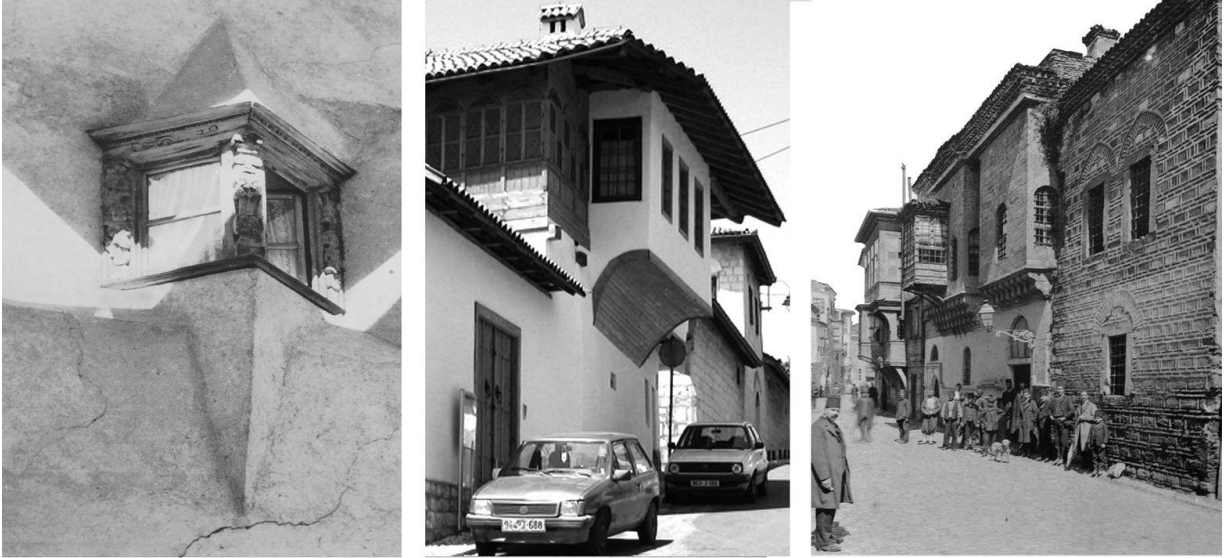
# 21

## OVERHANGING ROOMS IN DWELLINGS OF THE DANUBIAN REGIONS

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The poet Iosif Brodsky wrote: “There are places, examined on a map, that make you feel for a brief instant an affinity with Providence, places where history is inevitable, places where geography provokes history.”<sup>1</sup> Sometimes, rivers coincide with borders. In Brodsky's words, geography plays a role in history, and, I may add, architectural forms. As, for instance, on the boundary between the Ottoman and Habsburgs spheres, on the Sava River in Bosnia, where a wooden line of fortified *chardak* marks the border.<sup>2</sup> Both *çardaks* and (projecting windows) *erker* are part of those architectural elements, which together with the *sofa*-hall space<sup>3</sup> in vernacular architecture, define housing in the Eastern Mediterranean (see [Figure 21.1](#)).



[Figure 21.1](#) [Left: Bergün, Canton Grigioni, Switzerland \(Source: Cereghini, Le finestre a sporto Alpine, 24\); Middle: Alija Djerzeleza kuća \(house\), Sarajevo, Bosnia \(Source: <http://www.balkanarchitecture.org/> by J. Brooke Harrington & Judith Bing, now part of the Bing and Harrington Balkan Archive, Aga Khan Documentation Center, MIT Libraries.](#)

[Right: Byzantine houses in the Fener district, Constantinople \(Source: Cornelius Gurlitt, Die Baukunst Konstantinopels, Berlin: Wasmuth, 1912, LXXIX\); Below: Schematic plan of the course of the Danube River, plate composed by Serena Acciai.](#)

What do Alpine bow windows have in common with a merchant's house on the Adriatic Sea or a traditional house in Bulgaria? This essay brings to light a common thread throughout this vast region by tracing the persistence and declinations of a characteristic architectural element. This essay aims to define the different types of overhanging rooms in the houses of the Danubian regions: from Tyrolean *erker* (projecting windows) to Byzantine *sahnisins* (projecting rooms). There is a typological evolution of overhanging volumes in the Danubian regions' vernacular civil architecture, in which the rooms are dedicated to contemplation and as links between the indoors and the outdoors. This chapter comprises four sections: a historical and methodological introduction, a general survey of overhanging rooms from the Alps to the Balkans, specific case studies, and conclusions.

## **Projecting Windows in the Tradition of Domestic Architecture**

Projecting windows seem to have a long history, and it is not easy to determine whether they originated in the architecture of a single region. In the Mediterranean area, we find traces of them in Roman architecture. To gain space on the upper floors, the Romans used to overhang balconies, a device that at some point took the name *maenianum*.<sup>4</sup> We find this element also in Byzantine architecture, where the multiplication of kiosks on the upper floors of homes projected into the narrow alleys. These *solariums* or *şahnişin* made of wood gave protection to the view of the street below, and added to private space while not detracting from the public space of the street.<sup>5</sup>

In modern scholarship, this architectural feature bears a variety of names in many different languages. The term *şahnişin* is of Persian origin and means “where the Shah is seated (and can observe the outside world).”<sup>6</sup> In German, the unique term *erker* identifies both the closed balcony and

projecting windows. In French, we find the expression *fenêtre en encorbellement* and *fenêtre en saillie* but also the word *oriel*, which derives from the low Latin *oriolum*. In other parts of Western Europe, we note the use of bay windows (polygonal-based hinged windows) and bow windows (curved-based hinged windows).<sup>7</sup> In Italy, the term *finestre a sporto* or simply *sporto* is used, in addition to a range of other terms. We can still find examples of this type of window or closed balcony in some Italian cities. In Florence, these elements had both an accessorial and monumental character. In Venice, the words *liagò* or *diagò* are applied to external loggias, verandas, or terraces bordered by large windows, which, projecting from the buildings, are exposed to sunlight on three sides.<sup>8</sup> The name *liagò* may derive from the Greek *heliacon* (sunny thing). On the oldest houses in Trieste, one can still see the so-called *edicole* (kiosks), which, in dialect, are called *jazére* or *sburti*. These extended window ledges allow one to look out without getting cold or being hit by gusts of Bora wind. The kiosks were also improvised family refrigerators to store butter or other perishable goods, hence the vernacular name *jazére*.

In Mario Cereghini's important 1961 book, *finestre a sporto* are defined as small overhangs that serve to project space on the upper floors of a building for panoramic purposes.<sup>9</sup> The use of these elements generates a multiplication of views. Windows in Alpine architecture can be either elementary (one-story), multi-story, or complex. The latter usually correspond to elementary windows superimposed on several floors of the same building. We have evidence of these structures in the depictions of medieval and postmedieval painters since the original structures have been destroyed or lost in fires. Exemplary in this regard are the paintings of Giotto, Simone Martini, Lorenzetti, and Domenico Veneziano. In the church of San Antonio in Siena, frescoes by Martini and those depicting the Good Government and the miracle of San Zanobi by Lorenzetti, include views of Florence in 1400 with the characteristic wooden porches.<sup>10</sup>

It is difficult to localize these ancient and medieval overhangs to a single region since versions of the design element, with a range of typological variations, are found all around the Mediterranean basin, including northern Africa, thanks to Islamic architecture, the Iberian peninsula (*miradores*), and toward the east in the Balkans up to Asia.<sup>11</sup> In Egypt, the projections

are characterized by wooden grates called *masharabiyya*: lattice surfaces through which one can look without being seen. A well-known example appears in the fifteenth-century painting *Ambasceria Veneziana a Damasco* (*The Reception of the Venetian Ambassadors in Damascus*), attributed to a follower of Gentile Bellini and now in the Louvre Museum. These overhangs were prevalent along the old streets of Cairo and widespread throughout the Middle East and along the coast of western Arabia. In Europe, there are very few examples in the western Alps and an abundance in the central and eastern Alps, although with considerable differences between valleys.

### **From Tyrol to Istanbul: From Overhanging Windows to Projecting Rooms**

The geography of this study includes the Danube regions in the Balkans, all the way to Istanbul. Building on Cereghini's study, we can see how the Danube River and its tributaries have been the vehicle of living traditions. In this way, these projecting elements in architecture and architectural design have crossed a vast territory. Cereghini also reports how the “onion-shaped” outline of some Alpine bells is connected to Eastern influences that arrived via the Danube routes.<sup>12</sup> He supports his theory by citing the well-known fact that the Ottoman Turks reached the gates of Vienna by 1529. But, it would be more relevant to cite the settling of the northwestern border of the Ottoman Empire a few kilometers south of Vienna immediately after the battle of Mohács in 1526. For centuries, in the context of exchanges and cultural transmission in the region, we had the presence of the Ottoman population close to Vienna in the Danube area.

Perhaps not only the adoption of coffee resulted from the sultan's armies passing through the heart of Europe.<sup>13</sup> In Vienna, there is a small square with a bust of a man with a beard and turban *à la turca*; the inscription *Osmanlı Askeri Heykeli* reads “Bust of the Ottoman Soldier.” According to popular tradition, an Ottoman soldier arrived wounded in Moena. After the Ottoman army was defeated before the walls of Vienna, he tried to follow the San Pellegrino pass to return to his homeland. Fatigued by the long march, he stopped in the district of Ischiacia, where he was rescued and fed.

Since then, this small settlement was called Turkey, and its inhabitants Turks. The town's district still has signs and symbols indicating distant Turkey, including the crescent moon and star decorations. Furthermore, in the town of Rovereto, there is an extraordinary house—better known as the *Casa della Turca* (House of the Turkish woman)—that features a characteristic *hayat* (covered balcony) with finely inlaid wooden verandas. This house was probably part of an old warehouse that has since disappeared. Since 1417, this town was a center of textile activity. A well-known tale reports that the *Casa della Turca* was the home of a Turkish merchant who had settled in Rovereto for his textile business.

Beyond the pathways of the Danube, we can also identify the role of Venice as a mediator between the Ottoman Empire and the Italian peninsula and thus contributing to the spread of architectural models in the Alpine region. Predrag Matvejević writes how those arriving in Venice from the various centers of Europe encountered the Orient there.<sup>14</sup> For the peoples of the Balkans and the Near East, however, Venice represented Europe and the West. Thus, Alessandro Vanoli points out that Venice begins well before the lagoon: “Following the Adriatic coast northward, one realizes how the Serenissima is not just an island but an entire coastal world that has imbued cities and landscapes with itself.”<sup>15</sup> Maria Pia Pedani reports on the events of the construction of the *Fondaco dei Turchi* in Venice and how the famous Venetian *fondaco* (warehouse), such as the one created in the sixteenth century for the German state, imitated structures in which Christian merchants lived in Islamic territories.<sup>16</sup>

The influence of Venice even reached the Alpine foothills, which were under its domination for a while. Cereghini argues that the projecting windows of the Engadine, Tyrol, and South Tyrol are linked to the interweaving of various influences and traditions.<sup>17</sup> It may prove helpful to compare this research with the conclusions reached by Judith Bing in her 30-year study of the *chardak* (wooden veranda).<sup>18</sup> The term *chardak* is the Serbo-Croatian variation of the Ottoman-Turkish *çardak*, which derives from the Middle Persian *chahar-taq*.<sup>19</sup> It identifies the vernacular wooden element that takes the form of a raised porch, often projecting over the edge of a building's façade. This feature provides light to the house and allows the room to be open to the environment, adding more space and letting

nature in. In the west zone of the Balkans, the word *trem* more commonly refers to a covered gallery. In Serbia, the word *doksat* is preferred for overhanging portions of rooms. In southern Bulgaria, *poton* is the most commonly used expression, while in Romania, the word *chardak* is used only south of the Carpathians. In Macedonian houses, the *chardak* is the heart of every home, the element that characterizes it. This particular architectural element is thus widespread and has developed a local character and identification throughout regions of Eastern and Central Europe.

Throughout the regions to the north and south of the Danube River, we find endless variations of these themes and terms: what appears extraordinary is the typological value in the plan of these elements. The *chardak* is the wooden extension of the space that is the functional heart of the houses in this vast region. That space is the *sofa*, namely the gallery that gives access to the other rooms. The *chardak* (or *hayat*, to use the Turkish term) always performs the same function in the house. The *hayat* is the outer variant of the *sofa* space, i.e., when the *sofa* is positioned outdoors.<sup>20</sup> It serves as a connecting space for representation, reception, and celebration. It gives rooms a favorable orientation and helps provide ventilation. Both Cereghini and Bing accept that these “closed-open” elevated spaces belong to the orographic basin of the Danube and its tributaries. However, there are also notable examples of these overhanging features in Greece, Albania, and Turkey, which are outside the scope of this present study. A full investigation of this architectural element in Central and Eastern Europe, and throughout Byzantium, requires far more space and thorough investigation. In Constantinople, extant houses with these elements remain in Fener and the Galata districts. Thus, one can observe that as we move toward the East, these housing projections are no longer tiny protrusions in the walls but are considerably larger. We can affirm that, along the route of the Danubian regions and up to Istanbul, window projections develop into projecting rooms and portions of houses. The Ottoman house is characterized, in addition to the *sofa*, by the *çıkma* (Turkish) to indicate the wooden projection of the room over the street.<sup>21</sup>

## Case Studies

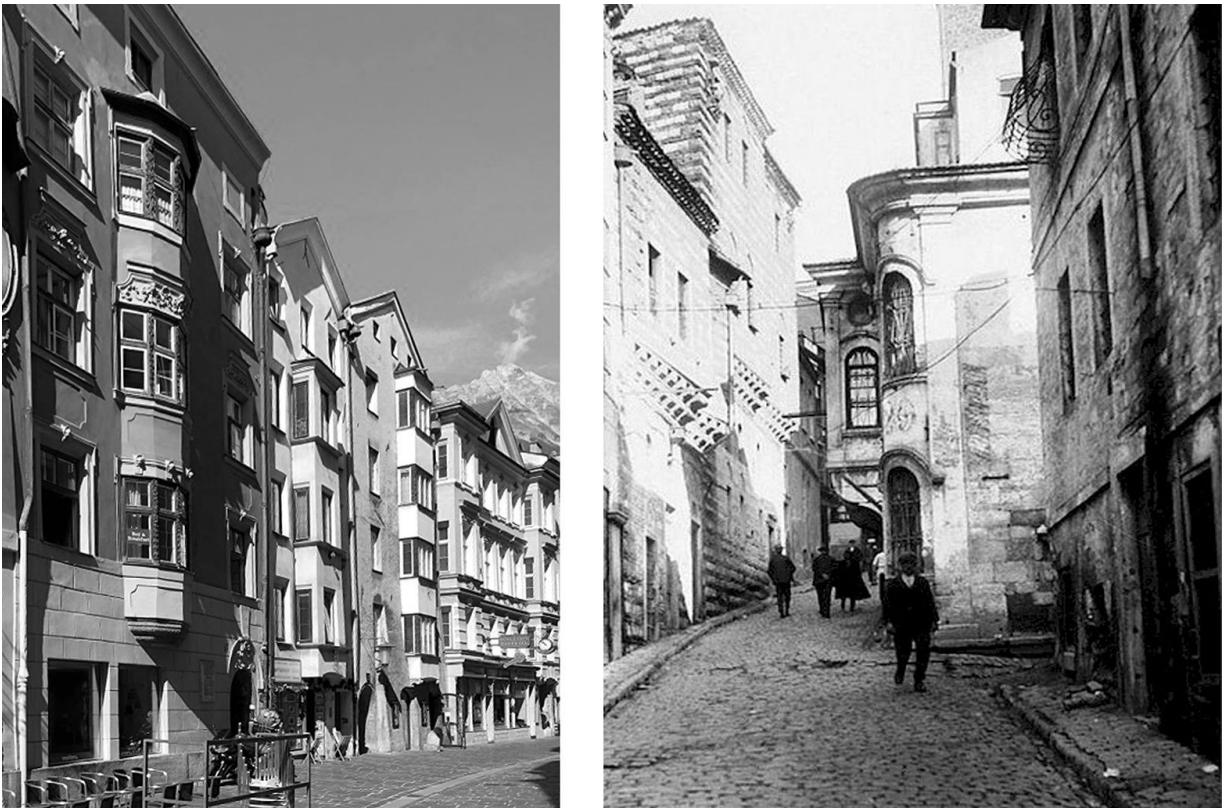


In this section, I analyze several case studies from the Danube area to support the thesis that the material culture of this vast region has traveled throughout the culturally complex orographic geography. The typological analysis allows us to isolate an architectural element to test its existence, value, and transformability. Furthermore, the study of the type permits the identification of those fundamental characteristics that define a building.<sup>22</sup> Thus, it can highlight the architectural component of the so-called “regionality” of Eastern European centers. There are elements, in this case, ways of living, that are reflected in the inhabited spaces, even crossing borders.<sup>23</sup> In combining architectural, historical, and anthropological meanings, this analysis aims to tell the story of something that would otherwise remain hidden in an area as rich in complexity as the Danube regions in Eastern Europe.

The first of the selected case studies is a comparison between two of the most distant places in the geography of this study: Innsbruck in Austria and Istanbul. It seems interesting to compare the repeated multi-story projections of Innsbruck with those of some houses in the Galata quarter of Istanbul, where there are still Byzantine *şahnişin* documented at the beginning of the twentieth century by de Beylié.<sup>24</sup> The street of Innsbruck shows the multiplication of multi-story windows, which create a welcoming, bright, and cozy environment, where one can observe the road below and the landscape in the distance: sometimes even sitting on wooden benches that follow the interior profile of the cantilevered windows. In this case, the façade has a small surplus, a polygonal window that, due to its architectural principles, perfectly fulfills the function that Dušan Grabrijan, speaking of the Macedonian house, calls the “right to a view” from your own home.<sup>25</sup> That is an old right of oriental origin: “the women, who were secluded in their homes, had to be given as ample a view as possible from the upper floor.”<sup>26</sup> The “right to view” is also mentioned by Sedad Hakki Eldem in his unpublished essay on “La maison turque” for the French magazine *L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui*. The *harem* (the part of the house dedicated to women) according to Eldem “*est la maison elle-même, c’est-à-dire le siège de la famille,*”<sup>27</sup> “it is the house itself, that is to say, the kingdom of the family.” Thanks to this example, one can see how the reiteration of the bay windows can help characterize a whole street. At the

same time, the presence of these overhanging elements along the Danube reveal the impact of Eastern models in other parts of Europe.

A comparable example is found in Istanbul. The Galata house on Perşembe Pazarı Street, with a corner on Eski Tay Çıkmazı Sokak, is a mansion dating to the fourteenth century, restored and turned into a *han* (inn) in the early 1900s.<sup>28</sup> The overhangs, which de Beylié also calls “galleries”, have a characteristic rack profile on both the first and second floors: repeated overhangs that allow light to be captured even in narrow streets like those of the old Genoese quarter in Constantinople ([Figure 21.2](#)). This example has to be read in dialogue with the previous: its relevance lies in the identification of the way the overhanging volumes, adopted from the East, acquired a different character in the new context. No longer does one see only windows projecting out from the edge of the facades. We can observe the repetition of out-and-out portions of rooms.



[Figure 21.2](#) Left: the cantilevered skyline of a street in Innsbruck, Austria (Source: Serena Acciai); Right: Perşembe Pazarı Cd., in

[Beyoğlu, Istanbul](http://www.istanbulguide.net/istguide/quartiers/persembep.htm) (Source: <http://www.istanbulguide.net/istguide/quartiers/persembep.htm>)  
) [plate composed by Serena Acciai.](#)

The second case study takes us to the Adriatic Sea and reveals how broad the area of impact of a housing tradition can be. It is relevant to remember that the northwestern border of the Ottoman Empire, after the Treaty of Karlovac in 1699, was settled on the Sava River between Bosnia and Croatia,<sup>29</sup> In Bakar, not far from that border, and at the same time on the Adriatic coast, there is a house named *Turska kuća* (Turkish house) ([Figure 21.3](#)). The dwelling relates to the tale of a local sailor who returned from Constantinople with a Turkish bride. The young woman had a strong nostalgia for her homeland: hence the sailor built the house with Ottoman features, using the overhang on the top floor to evoke Ottoman architecture. It is interesting to reflect on this last aspect: for a long time, this kind of building, especially in the Balkans, has been defined as an Ottoman house. At a closer look and following the theories of local scholars, we can see a strong validity of the thesis supported by Aleksander Deroko, a Serbian architect of Venetian origin. According to Deroko, there was the continuity of certain Byzantine typological features in Ottoman dwellings.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, he argued that the Ottomans inherited “the Byzantine house” when they conquered the vast territory that had belonged to the Byzantine Empire. Therefore, this Byzantine element was adopted in Ottoman architecture, and from there transferred to other contexts.



[Figure 21.3](#) [The so-called Turkish house in Bakar, Croatia.](#)

*Source:* Photo from the early 1930s by Milan Zloković, architect, Milan Zlokovic Foundation.

Continuing this overview, we arrive in Bosnia, in Sarajevo: the first major Ottoman city in the Balkans, created after the conquest of Bosnia in 1435.<sup>31</sup> The Ottoman rule and impact in the provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina lasted *de facto* until 1878 and *de jure* until 1908. In the magnificent traditional houses of Sarajevo, we see overhangs that are already portions of rooms: the characteristic wooden verandas of the Balkans (*chardak*) in Sarajevo are real closed rooms that overhang the street. As in the Alps, the harsh Bosnian winters have produced this particular declination of the *sofa* space, the main living room, which gives access to all the other rooms. The Alija Džerzeleza *kuća* (house) in Sarajevo is organized around the *sofa* where there is the staircase and access to the *haremlik* (the *chardak* of women) and the *selamluk* (one for men), which is the one that overhangs the street ([Figure 21.4](#)).<sup>32</sup> Such an organization in

the houses of Ottoman origin corresponds to the division of space by gender. Women had their *chardak* that always overlooked the inner court or the garden within. They lived most of their lives within the walls of the dwelling, while the *selamlik* was reserved for the house's representative and served as a public reception room.



[Figure 21.4 Alija Džerzeleza kuća \(house\), in Sarajevo, Bosnia, plan, sections, elevation \(Source: Grabrijan and Neidhardt, Arhitekture Bosne i put u suvremeno, 189\); photo from the street \(Source: <http://www.balkanarchitecture.org/> by J. Brooke](#)

[Harrington & Judith Bing, now part of the Bing and Harrington Balkan Archive, Aga Khan Documentation Center, MIT Libraries.](#)

The final example comes from Arbanasi in the municipality of Veliko Tarnovo in Bulgaria: here, Le Corbusier himself was fascinated by the traditional vernacular houses.<sup>33</sup> The Konstantsaliev House is one of the most remarkable and representative monuments of residential architecture in the village of Arbanasi, today a museum. The building dates to the late 1600s. We see a typical structure closed toward the outdoor side and opened toward the inner courtyard. The summer living room on the northeast corner of the dwelling offers an overlook to two parts of the courtyard. Wooden stairs provide access to the upper level. The projecting wood-framed element is constructed of studs and infill panels and coated with a white-washed plaster. In this example, the projecting space has the largeness of a room as found in many houses in Istanbul. The wooden roof structure is extended to shade the window openings. This example also shows aspects of the development of overhanging elements in dwellings along the Danubian regions. From Austria to Istanbul, and from Bulgaria to the Adriatic, these examples show the continuity and local adaptations of living spaces along the Danube River.

## **Conclusions**

The similarity of these particular areas of the house with the idea of living in the Mediterranean, explored by Albert Camus, deserves to be highlighted.<sup>34</sup> The principles of the Mediterranean house are not so far removed from the Central and Eastern European examples discussed here, with their projecting spaces intended to gain light and a better view of the outdoors. After all, speaking of the “Mediterranean house,” our imagination does not contemplate examples of Ottoman origin, perhaps even located in the Balkans, nor the fact that the Mediterranean region can reach as far as the streets of the Danube region. According to Egidio Ivetić, our idea of the Mediterranean, between imaginary, historical landscape, and picturesque, derives mainly from what the Mediterranean world was like between the

sixteenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>35</sup> The same is the case for the Adriatic, the sea closer to the Danubian regions, and for the Byzantine and Ottoman housing traditions.

This topic could open the path for future studies that examine local and folk architecture as a shared cultural heritage over a vast geographical area, avoiding nationalistic appropriation. If this essay is like a river, like the Danube, then it can bring us to the research of forgotten trade and multicultural architectural expression. Otherwise, as a roadmap, we should look to the impact of regions like the Republic of Venice or the Ottoman Empire and examine local specificities and cultural relationships.

The examples discussed in this brief study, including rooms for reception, spaces for women, semi-open rooms that extend the house into nature, and *places between heaven and earth*, are all expressions of Mediterranean *savoir vivre*. It suffices to reflect that, in the Bosnian language, there is a verb that expresses the concept of “gathering to tell”:<sup>36</sup> it is the term *divaniti* that comes from *divanhane*, composed of Arabic *dīwān* and Persian *khana*, and is used in Ottoman-Turkish to indicate the reception room, that public space of the dwelling that serves to gather together around a fulcrum and observe beyond the house, to talk and meet again.

## Notes

1. [Cited in Predrag Matvejević, \*Breviario Mediterraneo\* \(Milan: Garzanti, 2004\), 186.](#)
2. [Wooden veranda: For a more exhaustive definition, please see the following paragraphs.](#)
3. [On the definition of the \*sofa\* see Sedad Hakkı Eldem, \*Türk Evi Plan Tipleri\* \(Istanbul: Istanbul Teknik University, 1954\), 218.](#)
4. [Mario Cereghini, \*Le finestre a sporto nella architettura alpina\* \(Milan: Edizioni del Milione, 1961\), 46.](#)
5. [Nikolaos Moutsopoulos, “Bref aperçu des agglomérations traditionnelles de la Grèce,” \*Storia della Città Milano\* 9 \(1984\): 10–32, at 31–32. See also Serena Acciai, “Developing Deroko's Theories:](#)

- [Looking for the Incunabula of Byzantine Housing,” \*Serbian Architectural Journal\* 11, 1 \(2019\): 71–96.](#)
6. [From a conversation with Aslı Özyar, archaeologist and full professor in the Department of History of the Boğaziçi University, Istanbul.](#)
  7. [Cereghini, \*Finestre a sporto Alpine\*, 46.](#)
  8. [Pietro Contarini, \*Dizionario tascabile delle voci e frasi particolari del dialetto veneziano\* \(Venice: Cecchini Editore, 1850\), 351.](#)
  9. [Mario Cereghini, \*Le finestre a sporto nella architettura alpina\* \(Milan: Edizioni del Milione, 1961\).](#)
  10. [Cereghini, \*Finestre a sporto Alpine\*, 51.](#)
  11. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, 52. See also Aleksander Deroko, “Deux genres d’architecture dans un monastère,” \*Revue des études byzantines\* 19 \(1961\): 382–89, at 384.](#)
  12. [Cereghini, \*Le finestre a sporto Alpine\*, 64.](#)
  13. [See Daniela Calciu, “Sociability Seeps through the Lower Danube: The Introduction of Coffee to Moldavia and Wallachia in the Seventeenth Century,” in \*The Land between Two Seas: Art on the Move in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea 1300–1700\*, ed. Alina Payne \(Leiden: Brill, 2022\), 334–53.](#)
  14. [Predrag Matvejevic, \*L’altra Venezia\* \(Trieste: Asterios Editore 2012\), 28.](#)
  15. [Alessandro Vanoli, \*Andare per l’Italia araba\* \(Bologna: Il Mulino, 2014\), 69.](#)
  16. [Maria Pia Pedani, \*Venezia porta d’Oriente\* \(Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011\).](#)
  17. [Cereghini, \*Finestre a sporto Alpine\*, LXI.](#)
  18. [Judith Bing, \*Chardak, between Heaven and Earth: Tracing Vernacular Space in Balkan Architecture\* \(Maine: Procyon Lotor, 2019\).](#)
  19. [Bing, \*Chardak\*, 1.](#)
  20. [Eldem, \*Türk Evi Plan Tipleri\*, 220.](#)
  21. [Adolf Max Vogt, \*Le Corbusier, the Noble Savage: Toward an Archaeology of Modernism\* \(Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998\), 36.](#)
  22. [Concerning the study of type in architecture, see Rafael Moneo, “On Typology,” \*Oppositions\* 13 \(1978\): 22–45. Leandro Madrazo Agudin, “The Concept of Type in Architecture an Inquiry into the Nature of Architectural Form” \(Ph.D. diss., Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule \(ETH\), Zurich, 1995\); Francesco Collotti, “Il tipo come](#)



- promessa di forma,” in *Idea civile di architettura* (Siracusa: Letteraventidue, 2018), 33–45; Aldo Rossi, *L'architettura della città* (Padova: Marsilio, 1966).
23. Maximilian Hartmuth, “Negotiating Tradition and Ambition: A Comparative Perspective on the ‘De-Ottomanization’ of the Balkan Cityscape,” *Ethnologia Balkanica* 10 (2006): 15–33, at 16.
  24. Léon de Beylié, *L'habitation byzantine: Les anciennes maisons de Constantinople* (Grenoble: Editeur Falque & Perrin, 1902–3).
  25. Dušan Grabrijan and Juraj Neidhardt, *Arhitekture Bosne i put u suvremeno* [Architecture of Bosnia and the way [toward] modernity] (Ljubljana: Državna založba Slovenije, 1957).
  26. Dušan Grabrijan, *Makedonska kukja* [Macedonian house] (Ljubljana: Državna založba Slovenije, 1955), 228.
  27. Sedad Hakkı Eldem, “La maison turque,” unpublished text prepared for *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* in 1948, transcribed from the original typewritten by Serena Acciai and Chantal Paluszek. See also Serena Acciai, “La casa ottomana e il savoir vivre, introduzione a Sedad Hakkı Eldem,” *Firenze Architettura* 1 (2012): 94–101.
  28. Léon de Beylié, *L'habitation byzantine*, 17.
  29. Bing, *Chardak, between Heaven and Earth*, 42.
  30. Deroko, “Deux genres d'architecture dans un monastère,” 384. See also Serena Acciai, “The Ottoman-Turkish House According to Architect Sedad Hakkı Eldem,” *ABE Journal* 11 (2017): 1–31, at 14.
  31. Bing, *Chardak, between Heaven and Earth*, 91.
  32. Grabrijan and Neidhardt, *Arhitekture Bosne i put u suvremeno*, 189–91.
  33. See Danilo Udovički-Selb, “Les Balkans, genèse des ‘Cinq points de l'architecture,’” in *L'invention d'un architecte: Le voyage en Orient de Le Corbusier*, ed. AA.VV (Paris: Fondation Le Corbusier, Edition de la Villette, 2013), 210–17; See also Vogt, *Le Corbusier, the Noble Savage*; Alexandre Saden and Hande Sever, “Corbusian Monumentality: The Legacy of the Konak from Vernacular System to Modernism Monument,” *Getty Research Journal* 12 (2020): 49–72.
  34. Thierry Fabre, *Éloge de la pensée du midi* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2007).
  35. Egidio Ivetić, *Storia dell'Adriatico, un mare e la sua civiltà* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2019), 217.

36. [Fabio Fiori, \*Il vento i giorni\* \(Ancona: Italic Pequod, 2017\), 101.](#)

# THE BYZANTINE ALEXANDER ROMANCE IN SLAVONIC

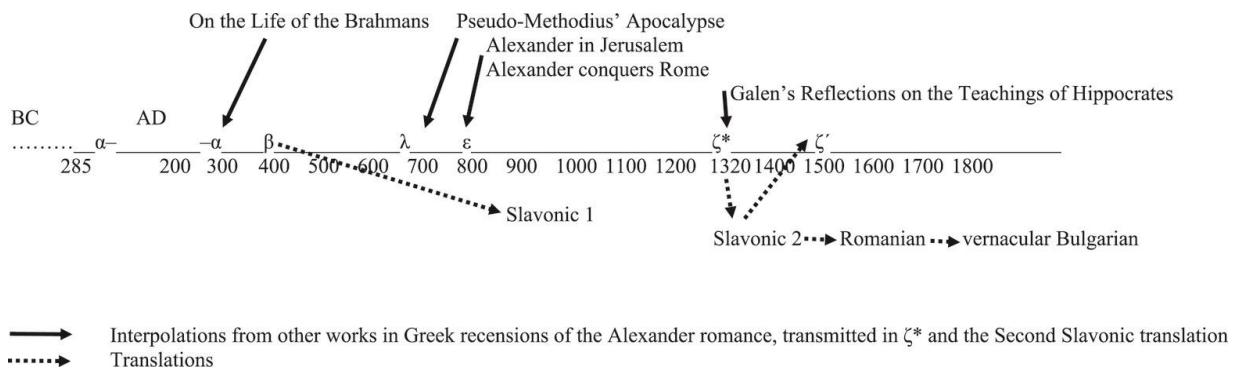
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The human need for stories has given the Alexander Romance (AR) a long life in world literature. This Hellenistic literary work deals with the life and deeds of Alexander the Great and was widely disseminated in Slavonic throughout the Byzantium realm. The fourteenth-century Slavonic translation of AR is preserved in an impressive number of text witnesses and has had a major impact on Slavonic literature. This chapter presents a case study of nineteen manuscripts that helps us explore Slavonic book production in the Balkans between the fourteenth and the sixteenth centuries and its significance for understanding of the Slavonic world in connection to Byzantium. The material highlights various kinds of data: text witnesses, environments of transmission, commissioners, readers, book types, text segmentation, and how the title and the content have been affected by transmission.<sup>1</sup>

The Greek AR's transmission in time and space has, starting no later than the fourth century, resulted in several reworkings, resulting in new text

recensions ([Figure 22.1](#)).<sup>2</sup> The text has been translated into Slavonic twice. The first translation, from the tenth century, transmits the early Byzantine Beta recension. This translation was not widespread in the Balkans but became popular in East Slavonic literature.<sup>3</sup> The second translation, on which this chapter focuses, was widespread in the Balkans. It transmits an enlarged late Byzantine recension from the fourteenth century and, in this way, relates to our understanding of the Slavonic world in connection to Byzantium, which is discussed in the section “Contacts and Transmissions” of this volume.



[Figure 22.1](#) [Chronology of the Greek recensions of the Alexander Romance, its interpolations from other works, and the translations to and from Slavonic.](#)

Source: Antoaneta Granberg.

## The Alexander Romance: Contents and Tradition

Rendering AR content is a challenge as the text is both voluminous and rich in content. Let me give an abridged synopsis of the second translation: the introduction of Alexander's virtues and greatness; Alexander's infancy; the conquest of Thessaloniki, Athens, and Rome; the victorious battle against two-headed humanoid snakes and wild winged women; the founding of Byzantium and Tripoli; Alexander's visit to Troy and Jerusalem; Prophet Jeremiah's and Alexander's conversion to Judaism; the conquest of Egypt; a failed poisoning attempt; the war against King Darius of Persia; Alexander's incognito visit to Darius; the royal funeral for the defeated king of Persia;

marriage to Darius's daughter Roxana; an account of humanoid creatures growling like wild animals, tall furry women with starry eyes, humanoid birds, and giant ants; the golden statue of King Sesonchos; an account of six-legged and six-armed people, people with dog heads, and giant crabs; the visit to the island of the naked wise men; an account of the island Makaron, whose inhabitants are descendants of Adam and Eve; the story of the source of life; the battle against the centaurs; Alexander's visit to the Sun Temple in Heliopolis and prediction of his death; Alexander's encounter with one-legged people with sheep tails and bellies full of green gems; the war against King Porus of India; Alexander's encounter with the Amazons; his victory over the people from the North; an account of the Caspian gates; Alexander's visit to the Nubian Kandake; his visit to a dungeon where the Greek gods, Darius, and other dead great rulers are imprisoned, awaiting judgment; Alexander's return to Roxana in Persia; Jeremiah telling Alexander that he will soon die; thoughts and quotations about the immortality of the human soul; the poisoning of Alexander; the death of Prophet Jeremiah; Alexander's death and Roxana's suicide; the burial of the spouses in a golden sarcophagus and the raising of a commemorative inscription at the site; and, finally, the division of Alexander's kingdom into four hundred kingdoms.

AR is preserved in eighteen Greek manuscripts of the different recensions. There are nineteen preserved Slavonic Balkan AR manuscripts up until the sixteenth century. The total number, in all areas of Slavonic literacy up until the nineteenth century, is over 160. Why was AR so popular in Slavonic literature? It contains stories about other continents and distant countries, descriptions of exotic nature, and strange people who live differently. Alongside the outlandish, AR also offers more historically steeped accounts of the ancient world, its kingdoms, and its female and male rulers. The inclusion of Judeo-Christian elements in the text as well as the depiction of Alexander as a wise victorious Christian ruler facilitates text reception in a Christian context. All this made the text appealing to the fourteenth-century reader. And when the Turkish Balkan conquest resulted in lost political independence, an important dimension was added to the text reception—the belief in the hero, the invincible Christian ruler, who fights and defeats the enemy.

No Byzantine apograph of the Slavonic translation has so far been identified. The translation contains the episodes about Alexander's campaign to Rome, his visit to Jerusalem, and his conversion to Judaism. It therefore, without doubt, belongs to a Byzantine version, related to the Epsilon recension. A comparison with text witnesses of a late Byzantine recension shows a close relation, but it also makes clear that none of them could be the apograph of the Slavonic translation.<sup>4</sup> E. Afanas'eva in 1984 and Ulrich Moennig in 1992 concluded that an unpreserved Byzantine recension must have developed from Epsilon, not later than the thirteenth or the first decades of the fourteenth century.<sup>5</sup> This recension is preserved in the Slavonic translation and in late Byzantine manuscripts.<sup>6</sup> Moennig posits that the apograph of the Slavonic translation represents an unpreserved late Byzantine recension Zeta\* from the 1320s.<sup>7</sup> He convincingly argues that the manuscripts edited by Anastasios Lolos and Vasilis Konstantinopulos are text witnesses to Zeta', a retranslation from Slavonic into vernacular Greek, from the sixteenth century.<sup>8</sup>

The original Slavonic translation has not been preserved. The oldest preserved text witness from the fourteenth century already contains modifications testifying that a translation must have circulated before the mid-fourteenth century.<sup>9</sup> A Slavonic translation must, if this is correct, thus have been done shortly after the creation of Zeta\*.<sup>10</sup> Since there are no known Greek manuscripts directly transmitting Zeta\*, the Slavonic translation is therefore a valuable source when reconstructing the Greek text.

The second Slavonic translation became widespread in the Balkans and also among the eastern Slavs from the fifteenth century on.<sup>11</sup> It was, in fact, the most transmitted noncanonical medieval text in Slavonic literature. Its popularity in the Balkans lasted all the way up until the nineteenth century. It was also passed on in a translation to Romanian, the earliest known copy being from 1620.<sup>12</sup> The Romanian AR was then, during the nineteenth century, translated at least four times into vernacular Bulgarian (see [Figure 22.1](#)).<sup>13</sup> No text-critical edition of the second Slavonic translation exists. This study is therefore restricted only to questions that can be discussed using data from the nineteen manuscripts presented in this chapter.

## The Manuscripts

There are 19 known manuscripts of the second Slavonic translation of AR, written in the Balkans before the end of the sixteenth century. One dates from the fourteenth century, six from the fifteenth century, and twelve from the sixteenth century. The manuscripts are presented in the following in chronological order. Three manuscripts, marked with an asterisk, were destroyed when the Serbian National Library in Belgrade was bombed in 1941. Editions, photos, and descriptions published prior to 1941 are today the only way to study these lost manuscripts.

1. Codex 226\* (further: NLS226\*), National Library of Serbia, Belgrade. An illustrated monograph, second half of the fourteenth century, 97 fols., in semiuncials, without beginning, without end, missing leaves in the middle. Text fragments are preserved in photos of the twelve illustrations.<sup>14</sup>
2. Codex 771 (BNL771), National Library, Sofia. An illustrated quarto miscellany, ca. 1430–40s, 273 fols. (AR is on fols. 1r–193v), in semiuncials (see [Figures 22.2, 22.3, 22.4](#)). The missing leaves were repaired in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The oldest part has fifteen colored illustrations; the newer part contains eleven poor-quality illustrations in one color and ten empty frames for illustrations.<sup>15</sup>
3. Codex Q.XV.168 (NLR168), National Library of Russia, St. Petersburg. An unillustrated mid-fifteenth-century quarto monograph, 144 fols., in semiuncials.<sup>16</sup>
4. Codex 521\* (NLS521\*), National Library of Serbia, Belgrade. An unillustrated monograph, second half of the fifteenth century, sixteenmo, 163 fols., in semiuncials, written by one hand; the first leaf and other leaves are missing. The copyist did not always understand the apograph and made mistakes.<sup>17</sup>
5. Codex 23 (NLS23), National Library of Serbia, Belgrade. An illustrated monograph, second half of the fifteenth century, quarto, 70 fols., in semiuncials, without beginning and end, leaves missing inside the manuscript. The copyist was unskilled and made mistakes; the same hand made the illustrations with rubrics.<sup>18</sup>

6. Codex Slav.Qu.8 (SB8), Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin. An unillustrated monograph from the 1490s, quarto, 196 fols., written in Bosnian Cyrillic script, without beginning, without end, leaves missing in the middle.<sup>19</sup>
7. Codex 522\* (NLS522\*), National Library of Serbia, Belgrade. A fifteenth-century miscellany, octavo, 236 fols. (AR is on fols. [1]–177v), in semiuncials, unillustrated, without beginning.<sup>20</sup>
8. Codex 1702 (NLR1702), the Pogodin collection, National Library of Russia, St. Petersburg. A quarto monograph, first quarter of the sixteenth century, 145 fols., the beginning and other leaves are missing, written by several copyists, in sloppy semiuncials. The only illustration, a human face, is on fol. 69v. There is a diagram of the four elements on fol. 127r ([Figure 22.5](#)).<sup>21</sup>
9. Codex 772 (BNL772), National Library, Sofia. An unillustrated monograph, first half of the sixteenth century, octavo, 118 fols., in semiuncials, written by a skilled copyist; the beginning, the end, and some other leaves are missing.<sup>22</sup>
10. Codex VI Fe 40 (RLL40), Roudnice Lobkowitz Library, Prague. An unillustrated quarto monograph, no later than 1546, 116 fols., cursive writing; written by one hand, in Bosnian Cyrillic script, with many mistakes.<sup>23</sup> Two handwritten copies of this manuscript are kept at the National Museum in Prague, written by Vaclav Hanka in 1825 and by Josef Dobrovski in 1852.<sup>24</sup>
11. Codex 1340 (BNL1340), National Library, Sofia. An unillustrated octavo monograph, middle of the sixteenth century, 185 fols., in semiuncials; the beginning, the end, and some other leaves are missing. BNL1340 has previously not been included in any research.<sup>25</sup>
12. Codex 352 (SASA352), Archives of Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Belgrade. An unillustrated monograph, the third quarter of the sixteenth century, sixteenmo, 2+268 fols., in semiuncials; written by one skilled scribe.<sup>26</sup> In poor condition and with missing leaves.
13. Codex Q.XV.45 (NLR45), National Library of Russia, St. Petersburg. An unillustrated quarto monograph from 3 November 1562, 247 fols., beautifully written in semiuncials by a very skilled meticulous scribe. A well-preserved manuscript.<sup>27</sup>



14. Codex IIIa 27 (CAS27), Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Zagreb. An unillustrated quarto monograph, no later than 1563, 202 fols., in semiuncials; missing leaves. The copyist was unskilled and made mistakes.<sup>28</sup>
15. Codex 40 (NLS40), National Library of Serbia, Belgrade. An unillustrated quarto miscellany, ca. 1570, 226 fols. (AR is on fols. 1r–194v), in semiuncials, by one hand. The manuscript is severely damaged; some leaves are missing.<sup>29</sup>
16. Codex 357 (RAL357), Romanian Academy Library, Bucharest. An unillustrated quarto miscellany, second half of the sixteenth century, 201 fols. (AR is on fols. [1r]–140v), in semiuncials; without beginning and without end.<sup>30</sup>
17. Codex 35, Φ. 152 (RSL35), manuscript collection of N.A. Markevič and I.Ja. Lukašević, Russian State Library, Moscow. An unillustrated, late sixteenth-century quarto monograph, 154 fols., in Moldavian semiuncials.<sup>31</sup>
18. Codex 24 (NLU24), National Library of Ukraine, Kyiv. An unillustrated sixteenth-century sixteenmo monograph, 206 fols., written in semiuncials.<sup>32</sup>
19. Codex 319 (BNL319), National Library, Sofia. An unillustrated sixteenth-century sixteenmo monograph, 265 fols., written in semiuncials by an unskilled copyist; the beginning, the end, and some other leaves are missing.<sup>33</sup>



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*Figure 22.2* [The battle with Poros, from the Alexander Romance, 1430–40s, Bulgarian National Library, Sofia, Codex 771, fol. 128r.](#)

*Source:* Bulgarian National Library.

**КРЕТЪ НАУЧЕ НА РИ**

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2

29

Дарнеже перьскі црѣ слыша вши га  
ко оумрѣ црѣ македоньскі флпъ  
покаі сара оу македо нїю посла сѣ  
епи сто лі ню . н ме то цоу писани  
є сн цѣ . дарне црѣ тѣ къ зе мни  
мѣ в мѣ н въ коу пе сѣ сани ѣ сн  
ган . н все зе мни . црѣ . црѣ . н  
гпо своу ю цн мѣ гпѣ . къ ѡ вртѣ  
таю цн мѣ сѣ . въ македонїи пишѣ .  
въ утонїи црѣ твоу мон моу при  
шлон . тако црѣ вашѣ флпѣ оумрѣ  
льн . н на црѣ тво сво мѣ ѡ ро ка  
мла ѡ ста вилн . сего не оу крѣ  
плѣ нна лѣ тн ноу мо мѣ . ѡ сѣ  
мрѣ тї же флпѣ пове азѣ ѡ скрѣ бн ксѣ .  
н ѡ ро ка не го не оу ка соу ца по жа  
лн . н сего въ дво и црѣ ка ми .

*Figure 22.3* The heading “Let us begin the story about Darius,” and chapter numbers 49, 50, and 51, in the left margin, written by a later hand, from the Alexander Romance, ca. 1430–40s, Bulgarian National Library, Sofia, Codex 771, fol. 24v.

*Source:* Bulgarian National Library.



Source: Bulgarian National Library.



[Figure 22.5](#) [The diagram of the four elements, from the Alexander Romance, the first quarter of the sixteenth century, National Library of Russia, St. Petersburg, Codex 1702, fol. 127r.](#)

Source: National Library of Russia.

All manuscripts are in Cyrillic, on paper, in one column. The most common size is quarto, but there are some in octavo and sixteenmo. Studies of these manuscripts help us build a picture of where they were created, who commissioned them, who the copyists were, and who the readers were. The manuscripts come from different scriptoria, mostly from the western and northeastern Balkans. This confirms Dmitrije Bogdanović's conclusions on polycentric book production, with several active literacy centers.<sup>34</sup> Surprisingly, no manuscript from Mount Athos is known from the period in question, despite the fact that the Bulgarian Zograf Monastery and the





political and ecclesiastical independence in the fourteenth century shifted dramatically during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as the Ottomans gradually took over the Balkans. This shift had a profound effect on education and the quality of book production. For example, the copyist of NLS23 was clearly poorly educated, judging by inaccuracies in the orthography and his careless hand. He also tried to reproduce the apograph's illustrations, with poor results. The manuscript quality produced in monastic environments in northeastern Balkans was, on the other hand, high. Wallachia was clearly attracting well-educated copyists, possibly refugees escaping the Ottoman expansion.<sup>38</sup>

All marginalia in NLS226\* were written by clerics. Until 1770, this manuscript belonged to the Patriarchate Library in Shkodër. It was then moved to a church library in the city and kept there until 1903. Marginalia from clerics are also found in SASA352. RAL357 contains marginalia from Bisericani Monastery, where it most likely was written. It was still there in 1713, when a monk on fol. 140v wrote “† аꙗ мноꙗ ꙗгрѣшнїи ермонаꙗ Гедиꙗ бывъꙗ певѣиег ѿ Соꙗки, поꙗлѣдѣже, въ Бесерькаꙗ, седѣꙗ и прочеꙗ сию Алекѣсандрию до коꙗца, въ ꙗѿо \*ꙗꙗска, \*ꙗѿгї” (I, the very sinful hieromonk Gedeon, was first in Solka and after that in Bisericani. I was sitting and reading this Aleksandriia until the end, in year 7221, 1713).<sup>39</sup> The description of the process as “sitting and reading” indicates that AR was a book for individual consumption. NLR45 was still at the library at Neamț Monastery library in 1729 when “the very sinful” Nahtanail Šeptelić left a note in it.<sup>40</sup> NLS40 contains marginalia from several readers, up until the first half of the nineteenth century, all of them monks and priests. AR captivated its readers, and several of them read it repeatedly. On the inside of the binding of NLS40 is written “Сию книгоꙗ прочатихъ аꙗꙗ грѣшни Хаћи ꙗнићие дꙗ ꙗꙗта” (I, the sinful Haći Ianićie, read this book four times). On fol. 4r, Abbot Makarie states that he read the book five times: “Сию книꙗ прочтохъ аꙗꙗ грешни игꙗмен Макарие 5 ꙗꙗтъ 1836” (I, the sinful abbot Makarie, read this book five times, 1836).

Slavonic AR was also read in secular environments. The readers leaving traces in NLR168 were secular people. BNL771 was read in a secular environment until the end of the eighteenth century, as shown by dated marginalia from 1542, 1550, 1567, 1712, and the 1770s.<sup>41</sup> CAS27 was read

by both monks and secular people.<sup>42</sup> The manuscripts provide information on the actors in book production and reading in the period from the fourteenth to the end of the sixteenth centuries. Slavonic AR attracted a wider audience.<sup>43</sup> Readers' testimonies are a valuable source in the reconstruction of medieval libraries. The manuscripts of AR, used for individual reading, were part of monastic collections and church libraries, as well as secular libraries. This is in line with the conclusions of Dmitrije Bogdanović and Nina Gagova on secular libraries being quite similar to monastery libraries.<sup>44</sup>

## Book Type and Title

The type of books in which Slavonic AR was disseminated and the variations in the title shed further light into the way Slavonic manuscripts of AR were received and read. The text length of AR is considerable, resulting in most Slavonic manuscripts being monographs. Four manuscripts are miscellanies that also contain other texts.<sup>45</sup> NLS40 includes AR and Pseudo-Methodius's Apocalypse. NLS522\* contains AR, *Brontologion* (a manual of divination by thunder), a prognostic text by birth date, and Pseudo-Methodius's Apocalypse. RAL357 contains AR, three texts about Christ's Passion, and the vita of St. Mary of Egypt. BNL771 contains AR, a story about the Kingdom of India, predictions by means of ecclesiastical books, predictions on the fate of an ill person, divination on how to find lost things, prescriptions against horse illnesses, *erotapokriseis* (about fate, on human ages, on the New Testament, conversation of the three hierarchs), John the Theologian's responses to Philagrius, the sermons of John the Theologian, those of St. Gregory the Theologian, those of Paul the Apostle, and the Troy Romance.

All four miscellanies differ in terms of the number of texts, their genres, and contents. There is no stable model as to which texts are combined with AR or in which order the texts are placed. Some text witnesses to Zeta´ are miscellanies; none of them places AR first while all Slavonic miscellanies do.

These miscellanies distribute stories from antiquity in Slavonic literature. They point to the complexity of the reception of AR, which clearly appealed to a wide audience.<sup>46</sup> The text is received as historical reading and is placed together with other historical texts. The Slavonic AR at the same time contains Christian rhetoric, which allows it to be placed in miscellanies with vitae of holy figures and accounts of Christ's Passion. The description of exotic things in AR is combined with various prognostic texts that appeal to readers interested in world wonders. All texts are for individual reading.

The beginning of a manuscript is often missing, being among the most exposed places of the books.<sup>47</sup> The preserved titles vary but have a stable core: “съ богомъ починаємъ. романць. житию. и повѣсть” (With God[’s help] we begin: A romance, a vita, and a story). The title in NLR45

is “книга александра македонска . житие и повѣсть” (Book on Alexander Macedon, a vita and a story). NLS40, NLU24, RSL35, and the later hand in BNL771 are entitled “Житие и повѣсть” (A vita, and a story).

The title core is a combination of “βίος ‘житие’” (a vita) and “διήγησις ‘повѣсть’” (a story). “A vita and a story” reflects the text reception in Slavonic: the text is based on a person's life and deeds while it simultaneously constitutes a broader story. Unlike “βίος житие” and “διήγησις повѣсть,” the word “романаць” (romance) is rare; it has been registered only in the Slavonic title of AR.<sup>48</sup> SASA352 does not have a title, but a later hand has written on fol. 131v “книга алѣксандриѣ о царевѣ” (The book Aleksandriia about kings). The title “Aleksandriia” is commonly used in marginalia by readers in the seventeenth century and later.

## Text Segmentation

Text segmentation offers valuable information on the copyist's expertise. Balkan Slavonic manuscripts of AR do, as a rule, not have chapter numbers, except for BNL771, which has chapter numbers written in the margin by a later hand ([Figure 22.3](#)). The only preserved Greek manuscript of Epsilon has neither chapter numbers nor headings.<sup>49</sup> Zeta', on the other hand, has chapter numbers and chapter headings, most probably added to Zeta' in connection to the retranslation from Slavonic.<sup>50</sup>

Elena Vaneeva's observation that Russian manuscripts have headings while Balkan ones do not needs to be revised since more than half of the Balkan manuscripts do indeed have headings (see [Figure 22.3](#)).<sup>51</sup> The initial phrase in the headings varies: “егда” (when) or “како” (how) in BNL772 and SASA352 but “скажаніе ω” (story on) or “повѣсть ω” (narration, story on) in BNL771 and BNL319.<sup>52</sup> The word “сѣкажаніе” usually translates the Greek “ἱστορία”, and the synonym “повѣсть” usually translates “διήγησις,” “διήγημα,” “ἱστορία,” or “ἀπαγγελία.”<sup>53</sup>

A heading has two features. The first concerns the text content. A heading does not change the text content, but it usually synthesizes the chapter content. The second concerns the function of text segmentation, indicating where a new chapter begins. The first feature can only be

achieved by a chapter title, but the second feature can be expressed without text, by means of punctuation or ornamentation. SB8, RSL35, BNL319, NLR168, NLR1702, and SASA352 have no headings, but either the first letter or word of a chapter are written in red, or the end is marked by means of punctuation, such as :~ or similar. Headings can either be contemporary to the manuscript or added later, by a reader. It can be concluded that the Balkan Slavonic manuscripts retain the structural features of the text by using headings, punctuation, and ornamentation.

## **The Illustrations**

Illustrations appear in the Greek AR already in the fourth century.<sup>54</sup> AR belongs to the illustrated books kept in the libraries of the Byzantine aristocracy, but only two illustrated Greek manuscripts have been preserved.<sup>55</sup> Illustrations have been transmitted in translations of AR. Illustrations in the second Slavonic translation testify that the source, the unpreserved Zeta\*, most likely had illustrations (see [Figure 22.1](#)). There are three illustrated Slavonic manuscripts: the monographs NLS226\* and NLS23 and the miscellany BNL771 (see [Figure 22.2](#)). The illustrations, among other things, show Alexander's birth, war scenes, and portraits of queens and kings. The illustrations in the second Slavonic translation, despite the time gap, belong to “the late antique picture-cycle but greatly altered,” as David Ross puts it.<sup>56</sup> Several illustrations have headings, which are affected by the text transmission and reflect its reception. The text witnesses of Zeta´, the retranslation from Slavonic into Greek, do not have illustrations.

## **The Four Elements**

BNL771 and NLR1702 contain a hitherto unidentified interpolation in the text, as well as a diagram depicting the four elements ([Figures 22.4–22.5](#)). The diagram is placed in the episode where Jeremiah informs Alexander that he will soon die. This episode is much longer in the Slavonic version than in Epsilon and Zeta´. The text describes how God created the human body from the four elements and made the divine soul as a rider upon these

four elements. If the four elements flow smoothly together, like four wheels of a chariot, then the human body will stay healthy.

The text in the Slavonic AR is very similar but not identical to a Slavonic translation entitled “Galen's Reflections on the Teachings of Hippocrates.”<sup>57</sup> This interpolation is found in all preserved Slavonic manuscripts and must thus have been included in the translation from Zeta\*. This is an example of a text originally not part of AR but adopted later (see [Figure 22.1](#)).

## Conclusions

This case study provides an in-depth examination of the symbiosis of local traditions and the Byzantine heritage in the process of Slavonic manuscript production in the Balkans between the fourteenth and the end of the sixteenth centuries. The manuscripts testify to several active literacy centers, spread throughout the Balkans. The competence of the copyists varied, reflecting the deteriorating conditions of book production in the Balkans from the fifteenth century. AR was mostly transmitted in monographs but also as the first text within miscellanies of historical texts, various texts from *erotapokriseis*, and prognostic books. AR was part of a broad literary production that reflected the interest and curiosity of readers at the time. It was a popular text, used for individual reading. Readers' testimonies place AR in monastic and ecclesiastical libraries as well as in secular libraries.

The Balkan Slavonic manuscripts retain the structural features of AR. The titles vary, but the core title, “vita and story,” reflects the reception of the text and its genre. The text over time continued to be enriched with additions from other texts, including the story of the immortal soul, the mortal body, and the four elements. This chapter presents a general view of research methodology on Cyrillic manuscript sources. The lack of a text-critical edition of the translation is, however, a major obstacle for studying the transmission of late Byzantine AR in its Slavonic translation. A text-critical edition would therefore be of great value for further research.

## Notes

1. [I am grateful to the Resource Center for Medieval Slavic Studies and the Hilandar Research Library at the Ohio State University \(HRL\) for giving me access to their extensive microform collections of medieval manuscripts and reference literature.](#)
2. [Richard Stoneman, “Primary Sources from the Classical and Early Medieval Periods,” in \*A Companion to Alexander Literature in the Middle Ages\*, ed. Zachary David Zuwiyya \(Leiden: Brill, 2011\), 1–20; Anastasios Lolos, \*Ps.-Kallisthenes: Zwei mittelgriechische Prosa-Fassungen des Alexanderromans\* \(Königstein: Anton Hain, 1983\), 1:11–30; Ulrich Moennig, \*Die spätbyzantinische Rezension \\*ζ des Alexanderromans\* \(Cologne: Romiosini, 1992\), 13–45; Ulrich Moennig, “A Hero without Borders: Alexander the Great in Ancient, Byzantine and Modern Greek Tradition,” in \*Fictional Storytelling in the Medieval Eastern Mediterranean and Beyond\*, eds. Carolina Cupane and Bettina Krönung \(Leiden: Brill, 2016\), 159–89.](#)
3. [Vasilii Istrin, \*Aleksandriia russkikh khronografov\* \[AR in the Russian khronographs\] \(Moscow, 1893\); Tat’iana Vīkul, “Aleksandriia Khronograficheskaia v Troitskom khronografe” \[The Khronograph-Aleksandriia in Troitski-Khronograph\], \*Paleoslavica\* 16, no. 1 \(2008\): 103–47; 17, no. 1 \(2009\): 165–210; 18, no. 2 \(2010\): 155–206; 19, no. 2 \(2011\): 149–200; Antoaneta Granberg, “Fragment ot Aleksandriiata i ot razkaza ‘Za chetirite golemi moreta’ v Molitvenik i Chudesa Bogorodichni ot 18 vek” \[A fragment of AR and the narrative on the four large seas in a prayer book and an account of virgin's miracles from the eighteenth century\], in \*Vis et sapientia\*, eds. Adelina Angusheva, Margaret Dimitrova, Mariia ĭovcheva, Maia Petrova-Taneva, and Dilianna Radoslavova \(Sofia: Bojan Penev, 2016\), 282–303.](#)
4. [Lolos, \*Ps.-Kallisthenes\*, 11–30; Vasilis Konstantinopoulos, \*Ps.-Kallisthenes: Zwei mittelgriechische Prosa-Fassungen des Alexanderromans\*, vol. 2 \(Königstein: Anton Hain, 1983\).](#)
5. [E. Afanas’eva, “K voprosu o sviaziakh drevnegrecheskoĭ, srednegrecheskoĭ i serbskoĭ redaktsii romana ob Aleksandre Makedonskom” \[On the connections of the Ancient Greek, Middle Greek, and Serbian recensions of AR\], in \*Drevnerusskaia literatura\*,](#)

- ed. Dmitriï Likhachev (Leningrad: Nauka, 1984), 31–44, at 43; Moennig, *Die spätbyzantinische Rezension* \*ž, 13–45.
6. [Lolos, \*Ps.-Kallisthenes\*, 11–30; Konstantinopulos, \*Ps.-Kallisthenes; Afanas'eva\*, “K voprosu o sviaziakh.”](#)
  7. [Moennig, “Hero without Borders,” 172.](#)
  8. [Note: \*Ibid.\*, 171.](#)
  9. [Radmila Marinković, \*Srpska Aleksandrida\* \[Serbian AR\] \(Belgrade: Beogradski universitet, 1969\), 333.](#)
  10. [Moennig, “Hero without Borders,” 172.](#)
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# GENRES AND TRANSLATIONS

## The South Slavonic Versions of the Palaea Historica

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The Slavonic text *Palaea Historica* (Ἱστορία παλαιοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ Ἀδάμ) is a literary relic whose nature appears uncomplicated, being—generally speaking—a retelling of some biblical stories. It also seems to present no difficulties in interpretation. It is a work whose late medieval copies—in the original Byzantine Greek, as well as Slavonic and Romanian—have been published and commented on in modern times and thus introduced into scholarly circulation alongside other literary relics preserved in various languages that transversed the cultural circles of the Byzantine Commonwealth. In the history of *Slavia Orthodoxa*, on the other hand, the *Palaea Historica* illustrates how Byzantine culture can be a source of inspiration for the domestic culture, and how the meaning of individual components of the work changes depending on the context of the current literary environment. In this chapter, I trace some of these components, using the so-called second Slavonic translation of the text, whose fate in the

manuscript tradition is distinctly richer. I discuss some aspects of the Byzantine *Palaea* from the perspective of its new linguistic form in Slavonic: the history of its translations, changes regarding its title, variations of the content, and some questions about its internal structure. All these factors build a portrait of the text as it changed in time and space.

The *Palaea* is a narrative text, firmly rooted in the Christian tradition of Byzantine literature: its content consists of paraphrased stories selected from the first books of the Old Testament, presented in the form of over 50 episodes, usually short and bearing titles. These narratives are supplemented with stories about the same characters, but from sources considered noncanonical and with poetic inserts. These components include excerpts from the Book of Psalms and stanzas of prominent Byzantine hymnographers, as well as quotations from the Church Fathers. The *Palaea* is complemented with minor fragments of normative character: anathemas that excommunicate those from the Christian community who enter into a dispute with the doctrine of the Church.

The unique role of the Old Testament in Byzantium, regarded as “an integral component of (post)Byzantine identity,” makes the concept underlying the *Palaea* clear.<sup>1</sup> The text itself has sometimes been referred to as a “popular” Old Testament story, however, without becoming a pauperized Bible.<sup>2</sup> The *Palaea* is included in the stream of parabiblical writings as a carrier of certain Judaic traditions, themes of extrabiblical origin, and content known from early Christian and Byzantine sources (like the Book of Jubilees, the chronicle of George Kedrenos, and a selection of pseudepigrapha).<sup>3</sup> The moral significance of the stories it contains is also emphasized.<sup>4</sup> Some scholars highlight those elements that are distant from the Old Testament message, referring to the *Palaea* as “a relic of apocryphal and legendary literature” or even including it directly in the apocrypha.<sup>5</sup>

None of the Greek or Slavonic copies of the *Palaea* known today preserve the names of its creators, nor the author who selected and prepared the Old Testament passages nor the Slavonic or Romanian translators. Only one of the Romanian copies (MS BAR 469) suggests that the author of this (or a similar) study “on the Creation of heaven and earth, the sea and everything else” is the bishop of Cyprus, Saint Epiphanius of Salamina

(315–403).<sup>6</sup> Such a clue allows us to look for the origins of the text not only in the Book of Genesis but also in Byzantine hexamers. This is only one piece of data regarding the *Palaea* but it demonstrates the text's great cultural, semiotic, and semantic context, which extends far beyond the capital of the Byzantine Commonwealth.

## The Translations

The *Palaea* was compiled when Byzantium had just overcome the collapse of Iconoclasm, a heyday of erudite argumentation by masters of the word and zealous defenders of the faith. The *Palaea's* terminus post quem is the lifetime of Theodore the Studite (d. 826), who, along with Andrew of Crete (650–740), John of Damascus (ca. 675 to ca. 749), and Cosmas of Maiuma (d. 750), is among the modern authors cited in it. The compilation of quotations, themes, and genealogically distant forms allows us to assume that its author, who freely combined biblical material with poetic texts used in the liturgy and pseudo-canonical stories, may have come from the monastic circles of Constantinople, for whom the *Palaea* would have constituted proper reading material that was less demanding than the Bible.<sup>7</sup>

Between the end of the tenth and the fifteenth centuries, the *Palaea* was translated into Slavonic three times. There is a hypothesis that later translations were created to replace earlier ones that were “going out of circulation.”<sup>8</sup> The first translation, created in western Bulgaria around the tenth century, is thought to have been in circulation between the tenth or eleventh and the fourteenth centuries, although its latest copies date as late as the seventeenth century. The first translation of the *Palaea* is represented mostly by Rus’ copies, however, it also bears a few Serbian linguistic features. The second translation, coming more overtly from the Serbian linguistic environment, existed from the second half of the fourteenth to the beginning of the seventeenth centuries (later copies are currently unknown). In addition to complete and fragmentary Serbian copies, it survives in fragmentary copies of the Tarnovo and Tarnovo-Moldavian redactions. The third translation, known today only from one copy with Rus’ linguistic features, was probably written in the fifteenth century.



Thus, at least two translations may have coexisted in time (if not space). Since the titles and beginnings of the text—and thus, presumably, their Greek protographs—differ, the translators may not have recognized the work that essentially had already been present in Slavonic culture. The number of preserved copies of individual translations suggests that the text was not very well distributed and was, therefore, not widely known.<sup>9</sup> However, it is difficult to agree with the thesis that the *Palaea* replaced the text of the Old Testament at a time when the testament had not yet been translated as a whole, since the *Palaea* includes only a selection from the first books of the Bible (from Genesis to Chronicles).<sup>10</sup> Perhaps the future discovery of the author of the *Palaea* or of one of its translations will make it possible to link the text to specific monastic circles in Byzantium and in Bulgaria or Serbia. The creation of the second translation around the fourteenth century may be connected with the expansion of Hesychasm and the growing readership of biblical literature in monastic communities.

The Romanian copies of the work date from the first half of the seventeenth century. On the basis of linguistic features, it has been estimated that the translation was probably made at the end of the sixteenth century.<sup>11</sup> It does not fully correspond to any Slavonic copy known today.

## The Titles

The variability of the *Palaea* titles in the Slavonic tradition suggests that they result from transformations of the original title; however, they are not the result of a simple process but independently occurring phenomena. The term *palaea historica* specifies what particular type of text is called *palaea* while, at the same time, functioning as the title of the work.<sup>12</sup> In fact, none of the several dozen extant copies bears the title *Palaea [historica]*, although the term appears in commentaries and as marginalia. While the second part of the name is of modern origin, the first part derives from the Greek phrase “ἡ παλαιὰ διαθήκη” (Old Testament). Its Slavonic transcription “палѣѧ” was used for various designations (to denote the Old Testament, either the Octateuch alone or with the addition of the Books of Kings and Chronicles, the Pentateuch of Moses, and various Old Testament commentaries and compilations).<sup>13</sup> The published Greek title appears to be

an “extract” from the heading: “Ἱστορία παλαιοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ Ἀδάμ” (History of the Old [Testament?] since Adam). The most common Slavonic title of the first translation is “{Сия} Книга бытиа небеси и земли,” meaning the *Book of Genesis* or perhaps the *Book of the Existence of Heaven and Earth*.<sup>14</sup> Sometimes another variant appears: “зач[а]ла книзѣ сеи в ней же о н[е]б[е]си и земли” (The beginning of the book about Heaven and Earth).<sup>15</sup> In the second Slavonic translation, the title refers to the Pentateuch and reads “Боговидца Моусеа пророка книга” (The book of the Prophet Moses watching God).<sup>16</sup> The latter title is an interesting phenomenon since Moses appears only in the later part of the text.<sup>17</sup> The latest–Romanian–translation of the work has no title: the edition specifies the heading “Palia istorică” as a reconstruction.<sup>18</sup>

## Content Changes

The internal structure of the *Palaea* comprises over 50 chapters: the number differs for individual iterations (the original, the Byzantine one, and the first and the second translations)—and even within each of them. These differences, however practically irrelevant to the meaning of the whole, prove not only the separateness of the sources of the individual translations but also the creative approach of translators and copyists.

The main (narrative) constituent of the *Palaea* is a paraphrase of the biblical text, thus making it a transformation of the hypertext. This change can be observed in several aspects: the segmentation of the content different from the biblical one and its division into independent units, which in the *Palaea* are titled chapters (instead of biblical pericopes).<sup>19</sup> The most important factor shaping the content are the episodes, scenes, and stories: units organized around the plot. The text of the *Palaea* records several types of speech. The most common is a narrative modeled on the biblical one. It is followed by replicas of individual characters (independent speech). The last type are fragments, quotations or pseudo-quotations from Scripture of a normative character (such as the Ten Commandments).

When I refer here to the metamorphoses of genres, I mean the effect of a change in the environment of the literary convoy in which the text functions; consequently, the “metamorphosis of genres” is a change in the

understanding of form and its closely related content. This means that a pact between the sender of the text and its recipient is suspended; the recipient, moving amid the unexpected context of the message, can make new interpretations. The metamorphoses of genres in the *Palaea* are particularly visible where the plot is interrupted or completed by the introduction of poetic statements. In this way, a mosaic is created, whose basic component is still the narrator's account, sometimes even identical to the biblical hypertext, but diversified with nonnarrative insertions.

In the *Palaea*, there are passages that, in fact, do not violate the biblical hypertext but repeat it almost literally, without abbreviations or formal changes (such as replacing dialogue with the narrator's statement). This is the case in the chapter "On Mara's Bitter Water," which is a pericope of Exodus 15:22–27. Furthermore, sometimes there is an interesting accumulation of Old and New Testament quotations. Thus, in the chapter "On the Death of Moses," the words "May the Lord rebuke you, Satan" are uttered by Michael the Archangel arguing with Satan about the body of the Prophet, so that the people of Israel could bury him properly, although the words come from the vision of the prophet Zechariah (Zec 3:2) and recur in the letter of Jude the Apostle (Jude 9). Dozens of similar biblical quotations of different lengths can be found in the *Palaea*. It is possible that they did not find their way into the text directly from the Old Testament but from other literary relics. This is an interesting phenomenon in which we observe how "canonical" (biblical) quotations find their way into the "noncanonical" (pseudo-canonical) and become "canonical" again through their placement in a text that is a clear reference to the Bible. Literal quotations from the Scriptures serve two functions in the *Palaea*: in storytelling (relating the components of plots) and in nonnarrative additions (such as summaries of episodes). The *Palaea* contains multiple small quotations woven into the sentences, which in its second translation, are found in thirty-three chapters (hence, more than half).

In the *Palaea*'s narrative, all sources are treated equally: the narrator does not give precedence to the Old Testament material over that with other origins. Thus, for example, in the story of the first humans, the text includes the unambiguously extrabiblical stories of Adam and Eve's mourning for Abel. The author freely draws on the so-called apocryphal cycle about Abraham, whose chronology violates the biblical one. As a result, we

observe changes in the intervals of time between events related to the patriarch, with contaminations and omissions. For example, Abraham is presented as a “star-reader” and follower of “idols,” whose abandonment of paganism is the result of a logic-driven thought process that determines all his subsequent actions.

One of the most interesting examples is the predilection of the *Palaea's* author for angelophany. This deepening of the visual layer of individual scenes enriches the biblical content with elements that are basically consistent with it but more picturesque. Several times the author shows the figure of an angel, including extrabiblical episodes featuring this character or skillfully transforming the biblical text. Hence, for example, in the story of Adam and Eve, it is an angel who instructs them about the inevitability of the end of human life, comforting them after the death of Abel. In the chapter “On the Wife of Uriah,” when the prophet Nathan is sent to the king (2 Sam 12:1), we see the introduction of the figure of an angel, who talks with the prophet, and then accompanies him in conversation with the ruler. Also in 2 Samuel, it is the prophet Gad who conveys to King David the announcement of punishment for his order to count the people of Israel, while in the *Palaea*, he is replaced with an angel. Certainly the angelophany is more spectacular and appeals more strongly to the reader's imagination than the God-fearing prophet instructing the king.

As mentioned before, there are at least a dozen places in the *Palaea* where canonical elements are mixed in with the noncanonical, making them canonical once again as a summary or elaboration of the biblical, even though no longer liturgical, material.<sup>20</sup> Evidently, the presumed apocryphalism of the text seems to blur when it comes to sanctioning extrabiblical themes, which are removed, to a varying degree, from the canonical account. The *Palaea* preserves pre-Christian narrations coming from the Hebrew tradition in the form that they were known in the literature of the middle Byzantine period.<sup>21</sup> It also exploits nonbiblical material, like the description of the lives of Lamech and Melchizedek, Abraham's military expedition, the penance of Lot, and the childhood and youth of Moses (from the apocryphal *Life of Moses*).

Because of the different segmentation of the text in its variants, the content of the two Slavonic translations differs somewhat from the Greek

text as we know it today. Thus, the second translation omits the details of the Creation of the world on successive days. It includes a brief chapter about Abraham's 318 men (Gen 14:14), but has no mention of punishing Moses's sister Miriam with leprosy (cf. Num 12). Furthermore, after the story of Deborah, only the first translation included a passus about Gideon, one of the judges of Israel (Jgs 6–8).

Furthermore, the Byzantine original and both Slavonic translations end in different places: the last common episode is the story of the census of the people of Israel by King David (2 Sam 24). After that the Greek text contains four more chapters, and the second translation only one, “On Uzziah the King of Judahite” (cf. 2 Chr 26:16–21). The second translation also lacks the rhetorical conclusion of the whole. Other differences in content result from the presence or absence of poetic commentaries.<sup>22</sup> The *Palaea* presents a wide repertoire of characters with certain desirable features in Christian society to serve as ethical examples, and the depicted characters and episodes have symbolic dimension as well as historical ones.

### **A Surprising Introduction to the *Palaea Historica***

Key to the *Palaea* is the extrabiblical material. In the first part of the work, which briefly presents the Creation and the life of the first humans in Paradise, there are anathemas against those who deviate from the orthodox interpretation of the Church's teachings.

Harsh punishment for deviations of a confessional or disciplinary nature is present in all known variants of the *Palaea Historica* (the Greek one and both the Slavonic texts). In the original Byzantine text, there are three anathemas, of which the second and the third are linked into one meaningful and expressive unit; in the first Slavonic translation, there are two, corresponding to the first and the second from the Greek variant, while the second translation contains two anathemas, corresponding to the second and the third from the Greek one. This is one of the most interesting elements in the *Palaea*: we observe the distinctiveness of emphasis in each version of the introduction, despite it essentially covering the same themes.

The anathemas included in the *Palaea* (in the translation of the Greek text) read:

By the command of God, he [“the one who once brought the dawn, but who is now darkened”] was hurled down from the order of the angels and deprived of his heavenly robe, and instead of light became darkened blackness. Some say that because he did not make obeisance to the man after being formed by God, he was cast out. An anathema on those who speak such nonsense. For the man was formed on the sixth day, but the adversary fell on the fourth day.<sup>23</sup>

An anathema on those who say that there was intercourse between Adam and Eve when they were in Paradise. [These people speak a falsehood out of ignorance of the truth.] For Adam after leaving Paradise spent thirty years grieving and in this way had intercourse with Eve. Hence, Gregory the Theologian, in his work *Yesterday on the Illustrious Day of the Holy Lights*, said, “Jesus was baptized at age thirty because of the sin of Adam at thirty years.” He also provides this testimony: “From the time he departed from Paradise, he spent thirty years and in this way he had intercourse with Eve.” To those abominable Phundaitae who say that the adversary had intercourse with Eve and [from him] she gave birth to Cain—anathema. For Adam knew his wife Eve and, after becoming pregnant, she gave birth to Cain.<sup>24</sup>

It is noteworthy that the smooth flow of the narrative is interrupted by such calls of extraordinary weight. They seem to resound much more powerfully here than in the texts where they appear in larger numbers, collectively, but in a situation where they are expected to be the strongest expression of opposition to the violation of the divine and social order.<sup>25</sup> There is an element of surprise at work in the *Palaea's* anathemas: they appear in threads that could hardly be suspected of unrighteousness. It is also puzzling that the first chapter is the “exchangeable” part of the text, varying in the original Greek text and the two Slavonic translations. One might ask: were there more variants of this chapter, and did other issues in different circles at different times increase the risk of conflict with the official teaching of the Church? Did the author of the *Palaea* put anathemas in it, associating their content with the described episode or topic, or did he

perhaps want to illustrate the threat of the consequences of a wrong interpretation of the Church's teaching? Were the Slavonic translators, editors, readers, and commentators of the text aware of the power of this fragment? In the available copies of the second translation, there is no trace, not even – in the marginalia, – of any reference to the anathemas.

## **The Poetic Component**

In the second Slavonic translation of the *Palaea Historica*, we find over 120 literal Old and New Testament quotations and evocations (in other variants, the number is similar); most of them come from the Book of Genesis (48), the Book of Exodus (26), and the Psalms (19). These quotations serve various functions: they contribute to the narrative and to the statements of the characters, they summarize chapters, and they are part of the commentary on the events described. At times, they are elaborate, equal in size to the pericopes; at other times, they are small, no more than a few words, taking on an aphoristic, symbolic form. The poetic element is drawn from the Psalms, as well as from Byzantine liturgical poetry (more than twenty extracts are from the *Great Canon* of Saint Andrew of Crete, and there are fragments of canons by John of Damascus, Cosmas of Maiuma, and others, intended for various feasts of the liturgical year). The poetic text seems to have retained its task of embellishing the narrative, along with enriching the stylistic and metaphorical character of the Old Testament narrative.

The way in which the author and the later Slavonic translators render the citations points to philological sophistication and perhaps indicates respect paid to the readers. The citations appear as poetic summaries of chapters, introduced with one of the following phrases: “concerning this, the hymnographer writes,” “psalmist makes mention of this ... when he says,” “and the psalmist states, that,” “but the psalmist also speaks about it in this way,” “the psalmist recalls this, saying,” “David makes mention of this when he curses his enemies,” “for this reason, the wise man recalled this story,” “in lamenting this, the wise man writes as follows,” “concerning this, the Cretan says,” “for this reason, scripture mentions this everywhere.”<sup>26</sup>

The number and selection of poetic fragments in the *Palaea* testify to the literary taste of its author. The assemblage is most likely a subjective choice, simply a collection of favorite, well-known stanzas, representative of prominent Byzantine poets. Genealogically and stylistically different from the narrative, the poetic fragments have a distinctly salient function: they accentuate the message of the main argument, regardless of whether they are placed at the beginning of chapters (just after the title), in the middle of the narrative (as an interlude), or at the end as a closure to the chapter.

It can be argued that the poetic fragments had a dimension other than stylistic or rhetorical. About ten quotations were taken directly from texts intended for specific feasts and liturgical contexts (Easter, Nativity, the Dormition of the Mother of God, the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, the Council of the Archangel Michael and Incorporeal Heavenly Forces, the Sunday of the Holy Forefathers). The abundantly cited *Great Canon* of Saint Andrew of Crete renders the *Palaea* a text associated with the liturgical season of Lent.<sup>27</sup> Perhaps the poetry here is an element that brings the *Palaea* closer to the repertoire of texts used in liturgy.

### **The Episodic Nature**

The two oldest Slavonic translations of the *Palaea* may be regarded as two separate texts. The differences between them depend mostly on the different titles of the chapters but also on their location within the text, the omissions or extensions of certain fragments, and the addition of minor details.

Fragmentary copies of the text's second translation are evidence of the changes made to the text. In fact, already in the fifteenth century, it was perceived differently than in its first period of existence in Slavonic translation, that is, as a collection of texts rather than an integrated whole (at least in the second translation; fragmentary copies of the first one are unknown). Perhaps the title, which was not assigned the function of “integrating” the content as a whole, was not well-recognizable; in the Middle Bulgarian copies of the second Slavonic translation of the *Palaea*, there is no common title encompassing all selected chapters at all, no element uniting all the contained stories. Additionally, the successive



chapters all had their own titles, which made it easier to isolate them from the whole. Today, it is difficult to assess unequivocally why some fragments of the work were extracted, rewritten, and often placed in a new order.

This rearrangement and retitling is the strongest evidence of the changing perception of the structure and integrity of the *Palaea* over time. Among the dozen or so copies of the second translation, some are complete with the whole text, all of which belong to the so-called Rashka redaction of Old Church Slavonic. They are also connected textologically; some of the copies were created in close (temporal and topographical) proximity. There is also a group of copies that are fragmentary, totaling twenty-two chapters, that preserve the orthography characteristic of the Middle Bulgarian and Moldavian relics. In at least three of these copies, it is noteworthy that the *Palaea* was missing its title and that some chapters were placed in a different order than the original one. In the South Slavonic manuscripts, we can find also copies of individual chapters. Some believe that the disintegration of the *Palaea*—the simplification of the original text—may have even given impetus to the creation of the so-called mixed-content codices, probably the most widespread type of manuscript among the southern Slavs in the fourteenth through seventeenth centuries.<sup>28</sup> According to some scholars, stories from the work, which were not too complex and written with a vivid language—affected traditional folk culture.<sup>29</sup>

It is the split of the second translation of the *Palaea* that seems to be the most significant change in the Slavonic tradition. As paradoxical as it sounds, it is an example of development through disintegration, which seems to indicate certain tendencies in the literature of the southern Slavs: independence and freedom of interpretation, the creation of new literary convoys and new textological traditions. It was a daring move to extract content that was more interesting, sometimes more thematically “fitting” to its new content. Thus, the second translation, both as a whole and in its selected chapters, seems to be the thematic center of the South Slavonic codices into which it was copied, which were collections of (predominantly Old Testament) stories and mystagogical commentaries that reflected the interests and cognitive abilities of their readers in the monastic circles. Such codices are placed halfway between high “official” literature and popular medieval readings, containing also an educational function. The *Palaea*

may be perceived as a key that opens space for new interpretative contexts due to its syncretism and its fluid transitions from narration in stories to digressions by the authors of the commentaries, who switch from presenting the characters to poetic and metaphorical representations of both people and events.

## Conclusion

Certainly the *Palaea* functioned independently in the Slavonic world: it took on a new form of the text's life in the new linguistic environment of Slavonic, introducing it to the ethnically non-Slavonic circle and, thanks to the new translation, to Moldavia and Wallachia. However, the fate of the *Palaea* in its Slavonic variants is still insufficiently understood. There is no good edition (only fragments) of the so-called third translation. The Byzantine protographs of the second and third translations have not been established. It may be possible to discover further copies of the relic text, expanding the current knowledge of the time and place of its application in subsequent editions and perhaps even linking it to centers of culture, writing, and spirituality in the Balkans or elsewhere (maybe even the Holy Mountain of Athos). On the one hand, the *Palaea's* Slavonic translations are revisions of a Byzantine literary, monastic work, present in medieval Bulgarian and Serbian literature, but on the other hand, efforts were made to let the text transition to different linguistic and cultural circumstances and take on a new literary shape. Nonetheless, the *Palaea Historica* stands as unshakable evidence of both the unity of the cultural community of the Byzantine Commonwealth and of local distinctiveness within it.

### Manuscripts:

MS BAR 469. Library of the Romanian Academy, Bucharest, MS 469, seventeenth cent. PH on fols. 1r-380v.

MS MSPC 42. Library of the Museum of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Belgrade, MS 42, the so-called Krušedol *Palaea* (formerly in the collection of the Krušedol Monastery, MS 85), 1420–30. The second Slavonic translation [PH II] on fols. 56r–112v.

MS MSPC 141. Library of the Museum of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Belgrade, MS 141, the so-called Velika Remeta *Palaea* (formerly in the

collection of the Velika Remeta Monastery), 1420–30. PH II on fols. 59r–110v.

MS Nikoljac 83. Collection of the Serbian National Library, Belgrade, MS 83 (formerly 15), 1425–35. PH II on fols. 121v–229v.

## Notes

1. [Paul Magdalino and Robert Nelson, \*Introduction to The Old Testament in Byzantium\*, eds. P. Magdalino and R. Nelson \(Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2010\), 1–38, at 7.](#)
2. [A. B. Vassiliev, \*Anecdota graeco-byzantina\* \(Moscow, 1893\), 188–92; S. Franklin, “Palaia,” in \*Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium\*, ed. A. P. Kazhdan \(New York: Oxford University Press, 1991\), 1:1557. H. F. Marshall views this function of the \*Palaea\* based on iconographic sources: “\[\*Palaea Historica\*\] omitted the theological arguments and confined themselves to Biblical narrative interspelled with legends” \(\*Old testament legends from a Greek poem on Genesis and Exodus of Georgios Chumnos\* \[Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1925\], xxii–xxiii\).](#)
3. [See, e.g., Анатолий А. Алексеев \[Alekseev\], “Апокрифы Толковой палеи, переведенные с еврейских оригиналов” \[The explanatory \*Palaea\* apocrypha translated from Jewish originals/sources\], \*Труды Отдела древнерусской литературы\* 58 \(2007\): 42–57.](#)
4. [William Adler, “Parabiblical Traditions and Their Use in the \*Palaea Historica\*,” in \*Tradition, Transmission, and Transformation from Second Temple Literature Through Judaism and Christianity in Late Antiquity\*, eds. Menahem Kister, Hillel Newman, Michael Segal, and Ruth Clements \(Leiden: Brill, 2015\), 1–40.](#)
5. [See О. А. Державина \[Derzhavina\], “Палея,” in \*Краткая литературная энциклопедия\*, ed. А. А. Сурков \(Moscow, 1968\); Jean-Claude Haelewyck, ed., \*CAVT: Clavis apocryphorum Veteris Testamenti\* \(Turnhout: Brepols, 1998\), 219 \(no. 277\). The \*Palaea Historica\* is older than two other types of similar compilation, i.e., the \*Explanatory Palaea\* and the \*Chronographic Palaea\*, particularly relevant to the writings of the Eastern Slavs. For the \*Explanatory\*](#)

*Palaea*, see *Палея толковая по списку, сделанному в Коломне в 1406* [The explanatory *Palaea* from the copy made in Kolomna in the year 1406], ed. Н. С. Тихонравова, vols. 1–2 (Moscow: O. Gerbek, 1892–96); *Палея толковая* [The Explanatory *Palaea*], trans. and ed. А. М. Камчатнов, commentary by В. В. Мильков and С. М. Полянский (Moscow: Soglasie, 2002). For the *Chronographic Palaea*, see Евгений Г. Водолазкин [Vodolazkin], “Краткая хронографическая палея: Текст” [A short *Palaea* chronographica: A text], *Труды Отдела древнерусской литературы*, part 1, 57 (2006): 891–915; part 2, 58 (2008): 534–56; part 3, 61 (2010): 345–74; Sabine Fahl and Dieter Fahl, with Evgenij Vodolazkin und Tat’jana Rudi, *Die kurze Chronographische Paleja*, vol. 1, *Kritische Edition mit deutscher Übersetzung* (Munich: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2019); Sabine Fahl, Dieter Fahl, and Christfried Böttrich, with Michail Šibaev und Ivan Christov, *Die kurze Chronographische Paleja*, vol. 2, *Einführung, Kommentar, Indices* (Munich: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2019). The content of the palaeas of different types has been the subject of genealogical and textological studies, proving their interaction with literary works of the Byzantine and Slavonic Middle Ages including chronicles, hexamerons, patristic literature, and others; see, e.g., Marshall, *Old Testament Legends*; cf. Elizabeth Jeffreys, “Old Testament ‘History’ and the Byzantine Chronicle,” in Magdalino and Nelson, *Old Testament in Byzantium*, 153–74, at 157n13; Галина С. Баранкова [Barankova], “О взаимоотношениях ‘Шестоднева’ Иоанна экзарха Болгарского и ‘Толковой палеи,’” in *История русского языка: исследования и тексты* (Moscow: Nauka Publishing House, 1982), 262–77; Олег В. Творогов [Tvorogov], “Летопись—хроника—палея (взаимоотношения памятников и методика их исследования),” in *Библия и возрождение культуры русского и других славянских народов: к 80-летию Русской Северо-западной Библейской Комиссии (1915–1995)* (St. Petersburg: Petropolis, 1995), 166–79; Анатолий А. Алексеев [Alekseev], “Палея в системе хронографического жанра,” *Труды Отдела древнерусской литературы* 57 (2006): 25–32; Татьяна Вилкул [Vilkul], “Толковая палея и *Повесть временных лет*. Сюжет о ‘раздѣлении языкѣ,’” *Ruthenica* 6 (2007): 37–85; Явор

- Милтенев [Miltenov], “Ексцерптите от Диалозите на Псевдо-Кесарий в Тълковната палея” [Excerpts from the Pseudo-Caesarius in the explanatory Palaea], in *Известия на Научен център Св. Дазий Доростолски* (Ruse: University Press, 2007), 2:183–96.
6. Alexandra Moraru and Mihai Moraru, eds., *Palia istorică* (Bucharest: Fundația Națională pentru Știință și Artă, 2001), 52–243, at 101.
  7. Андрей Н. Попов [Popov], *Книга бытия небеси и земли (Палея историческая) с приложением сокращенной палеи русской редакции* [The book of Heaven and Earth (the historical Palaea) with addition of the shortened Russian version of the Palaea] (Moscow: University Press, 1881), 1–172; David Flusser, “Palaea Historica – An Unknown Source of Biblical Legends,” in *Studies in Aggadah and Folk-Literature*, eds. J. Heinemann and D. Noy, *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 22 (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1971), 48–79.
  8. For a summary of the discussion of the Methodian translation of the books of the Bible, see Татьяна Славова [Slavova], “Библейски преводи преди и по време на Моравската мисия” [Biblical translations before and during the Moravian mission], in *История на българската средновековна литература* [History of the Mediaeval Bulgarian literature], ed. А. Милтенова (Sofia: Изток–Запад, 2008), 93–99, at 97–99.
  9. The first translation of the *Palaea Historica* exists in the largest number of preserved copies (twenty), followed by the second (about ten); the third was recorded in only one copy. See Johannes Reinhart, “Die älteste Bezeugung der Historischen Paläa in slavischer Übersetzung (Cod. Slav. Vindob. Nr. 158),” *Прилози за књижевност, језик, историју и фолклор* 73 (2007): 45–75, at 60–61; Małgorzata Skowronek, *Średniowieczne opowieści biblijne: Paleja historyczna w tradycji bizantyńsko-słowiańskiej* [Mediaeval biblical stories: The Historical Palaea in the Byzantine-Slavonic tradition] (Łódź: Lodz University Press, 2017), 22–26.
  10. Федор А. Веревский [Verevskij], “Русская историческая палея,” *Филологические записки* 2 (1888): 1–18, at 1.
  11. Emil Turdeanu, “La Palaea Byzantine chez les slaves du Sud et chez les Roumains” [The Byzantine Palaea among the South Slavs and the

- Romanians], *Revue des études slaves* 40 (1964): 195–206; Moraru and Moraru, *Palia istorică*, 10.
12. On the specifics of the term, see Евгений Г. Водолазкин [Vodolazkin], *Всемирная история в литературе Древней Руси (на материале хронографического и палеяного повествования XI–XIV века)* [The world's history in the Old Russian literature based on the chronography and palaea narratives of the 11th–14th centuries] (St. Petersburg: Pushkinskij Dom, 2008), 35.
  13. The Slavonic terms has the following variants: палеа, палея, палеА, палѢА, and even ‘паліа and палиА’ (see Флавиан Добрянский [Dobryjanskij], *Описание рукописей Виленской публичной библиотеки, церковно-славянских и русских* [Description of the Church-Slavonic and Russian manuscripts from the Vilnius Public Library] [Vilna, 1882], 44), as well as палемаѢ (see I. Франко [Franko], ed., *Апокрифи і легенди з українських рукописів, vol 1, Апокрифи старозавтні* [Lviv: Ivan Franko Lviv National University, 1896, repr. 2006], 49). For lists of manuscripts (with citations) in which the term functions, see Татьяна Славова [Slavova], *Тълковната палея в контекста на старобългарската книжнина* [The Explanatory Palaea in the context of the Old-Bulgarian literary output] (Sofia: St. Kliment Ohridski University Press, 2002), 38–40; Евгений Г. Водолазкин [Vodolazkin], “Из истории кирилло-белозерских палей” [On the history of the Palaea copies from the St. Cyril's Monastery], in *Книжные центры Древней Руси: книжнина и рукописи Кирилло-Белозерского монастыря* (St. Petersburg: Pushkinskij Dom, 2014), 286–309, at 286. On the history of the term “palaea” in Byzantine and Slavonic writings, see Ростислав А. Станков [Stankov], “Слово палѢА в древней славянской письменности” [The word “palaea” in Old Slavonic writings], in *Акы бѣчела любодѣльна. Юбилеен сборник в чест на доц. д-р Цветанка Янакиева, ed. д-р Павел Георгиев and доц. Валентин Кулев* (Шумен: Scientific centre Preslavska knizhovna shkola, 2010): 67–80; Евгений Г. Водолазкин [Vodolazkin], “Новое о палеях (некоторые итоги и перспективы изучения палеяных текстов)” [The new data on the palaeae some results and perspectives of the research on the palaeas], *Русская литература* 1 (2007): 3–23; cf.

- [Анисава Милтенова \[Miltenova\], “Палея,” in \*Старобългарска литература\*, eds. Д. Петканова, Ив. Добрев, А. Милтенова, \(Veliko Tarnovo: Abagar Publishing House, 2003\): 345–46, at 354; Dobrjanskij, \*Описание рукописей Виленской публичной библиотеки\*, 150.](#)
14. [Thus, in the first Slavonic edition of the \*Palaea Historica\*: Сиа книга бытіа н\[е\]б\[е\]си и земли, quoted in Попов \[Popov\], \*Книга бытія небеси и земли\*, 1.](#)
  15. [Вася Велинова \[Velinova\] and Нина Вутова \[Vutova\], \*Славянски рѣкописи, кирилски печатни книги и периодични издания\*, Sofia: St. Cyril and Methodius National Library, 2013\), 1:86.](#)
  16. [Б\[о\]говидца Моусеа пр\[о\]р\[о\]ка книга, quoted in MSPC 42, fol. 56r21.](#)
  17. [Thus, in the three copies of PH II, containing all the chapters from the very beginning of the text, and not the selection of chapters: MSPC 42, MSPC 41, and Nikoljac 83. For the second Slavonic translation, see Małgorzata Skowronek, \*Palaea Historica: The Second Slavic Translation; Commentary and Text\* \(Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2016\), 59–180.](#)
  18. [Moraru and Moraru, \*Palia istorică\*, 101.](#)
  19. [The chapter titles are another element bringing the \*Palaea Historica\* closer to the South Slavonic translations and copies of the Eight Books of the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries; on the latter, see, among others, Георги Минчев \[Minchev\], “Пшинская Библия первой четверти XVI века—малоизвестная южнославянская рукопись, содержащая перевод Восьмикнижия” \[The Pshina Bible from the first quarter of the sixteenth century: A hardly known South Slavic manuscript containing the Octateuch translation\], in \*Священное Писание как фактор языкового и литературного развития: Материалы международной конференции “Священное Писание как фактор языкового и литературного развития \(в ареале авраамических религий\)”\*, Санкт-Петербург, 30 июня 2009, ed. Е. Н. Мещерская \(St. Petersburg: Dmitriy Bulanin, 2011\), 223–40.](#)
  20. [Cf. Aleksander Naumow, \*Apokryfy w systemie literatury cerkiewnosłowiańskiej\* \[Apocrypha in the system of the Church-Slavonic literature\] \(Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1976\), 64, 79–81.](#)

21. [Christian Böttrich, “Palaea/Paleja: Ein byzantinisch-slavischer Beitrag zu den europäischen Historienbibeln,” in \*Fragmentarisches Wörterbuch: Beiträge zur biblischen Exegese und christlichen Theologie\*; Horst Balz zum 70. Geburtstag, eds. K. Schiffner, K. Wengst, and W. Zager \(Stuttgart: Kohlhammer W., GmbH, 2007\), 304–13, at 313.](#)
22. [The most important of these, by virtue of volume, include the additions in the chapters: \*On the Sacrifice of Isaac\*, \*On the Amalekite\*, \*On the Bitter Water of Mary\*, and \*On the Restoration of the Tabernacle\* \(all in the second translation\).](#)
23. [William Adler, “Palaea Historica \(‘The old testament history’\): A New Translation and Introduction,” in \*Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: More Noncanonical Scriptures\*, eds. Richard Bauckham, James R. Davila, and Alexander Panayotov \(Cambridge, UK: Publisher: Eerdmans, 2013\), 1:585–672, at 600.](#)
24. [Adler, “Palaea Historica,” 602–3.](#)
25. [On the synodicons in the Slavonic world, see, among others, М.Г. Попруженко \[Popruženko\], “Синодик царя Борила,” \*Български старини / Bălgarski starini\* 8 \(1928\); В. А. Мошин \[V. A. Mošin\], “Сербская редакция синодика в неделя православия. Анализ текстов” \[The Serbian redaction of the Sinodicon and the Sunday of the Orthodox Christianity. The text analysis\], \*Византийский временник/Vizantijskij vremennik\* 16 \(1959\): 317–94; Иван Билярски \[Biljarski\], \*Палеологовият синодик в славянски превод\* \[The Palaiologos Sinodicon in a Slavonic translation\] \(Sofia: St. Kliment Ohridski University Press, 2013\); Anna-Maria Totomanova, “The Synodikon of Orthodoxy in Medieval Bulgaria,” \*Studia Ceranea. Journal of the Waldemar Ceran Research Centre for the History and Culture of the Mediterranean Area and South-East Europe\* 7 \(2017\): 169–227.](#)
26. [Respectively, Adler, “Parabiblical Traditions,” 626, 639, 645, 647, 649, 651, 652, 655, 656, 658.](#)
27. [Derek Krueger, “The Great Kanon of Andrew of Crete, the Penitential Bible, and the Liturgical Formation of the Self in the Byzantine Dark Age,” in \*Between Personal and Institutional Religion: Self, Doctrine, and Practice in Late Antique Eastern\*, eds. B. Bitton-Ashkelony and L.](#)



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28. Turdeanu, “Palaea Byzantine,” 203–4.
29. Ewa Kocój, *Pamięć starych wieków: symbolika czasu w rumuńskim kalendarzu prawosławnym* [The memory of old centuries: Symbols of time in the Romanian Orthodox calendar] (Kraków: Jagiellonian University Press, 2013), 157.

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COMMUNICATION AND  
MEMORY IN MEDIEVAL  
CHURCH SLAVONIC PARATEXTS  
IN THE BALKANS

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**Introduction**

The short literary forms usually called paratexts are characterized by an extraordinary multiplicity and a long course of development.<sup>1</sup> They can be found from the dawn of the writing tradition, appearing as accompanying or side texts, located on the edges or the final folia of manuscripts and early printed books. In different scholarly traditions, including the Slavic, the varied, rich, and unstable terminology for this type of texts includes: microworks, microtexts, additions, annotations, marginalia, notes, comments, colophons, records, subscriptions, inscriptions, metatexts, paratexts, extratexts, peritexts, anagraphs, and more. Our examinations of medieval Church Slavonic paratexts, particularly from the Balkans, is

preceded by their brief description, which seems justified in light of the very modest presence of these compositions from an explorative and research perspective; these cultural texts, literary forms, and memory-communication media are not often in the foreground of Slavic studies, but some proposals for their identification and interpretation can already be found in the scholarly literature.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, there is a relatively large collection of publications in the form of anthologies or editions as part of larger selections of literary works.<sup>3</sup> However, the valuable and rich source material of Church Slavonic paratexts usually remains on the periphery of scholarly consideration. Therefore, their presentation and discussion from various perspectives—factual, textological, genealogical, topical, themological, and functional—is useful to reveal their roles in the communication processes of the medieval Balkans. Throughout, it is worth reflecting on all these aspects in total, with their common denominator being the phenomenon of communication, which not only accompanied all writing activities but also essentially shaped the manuscript tradition and scriptorial practice, bearing numerous fruits, such as the discussed Church Slavonic paratexts from the *Slavia Orthodoxa* area in the South Slavic variant.

The main goal of this chapter is to present and comment on the specific and most relevant features and functions of these microworks in South Slavic sources, which consist of Cyrillic manuscripts and early printed books. After some remarks on terminology and a presentation of propositions for scholarly classification of Church Slavonic paratexts, we analyze the communicative function of these textual artifacts and their role in the historical and cultural memory of the Balkans, primarily among Orthodox Slavs. We also present and comment on the repertoire of main themes, topoi, and consistent elements in Old Serbian and Old Bulgarian sources and their editions. Our analysis helps emphasize the importance of paratexts not as secondary or auxiliary texts but as works with a separate and specific tradition, linked geographically and historically, especially in terms of literary communication in the post-Byzantium and South Slavic area.

## **Terminology and Systematic Remarks**

Paratexts are commonly recognized as supplementary texts but, due to their structure, a set of fixed features, thematic substrates, and communicative and descriptive strategies, they should instead be treated as separate, independent, often very elaborate texts (microworks) or literary miniatures. Such was their status in relation to the old Christian writings of both Western and Eastern Christian provenance: these short forms were featured on the pages of Latin, Syrian, Greek, Byzantine, and later also Slavonic manuscripts and early printed books. They seem to be characteristic and particularly numerous in the area of the *Slavia Orthodoxa*, pointing to the shared literary and, more broadly, cultural community. Moreover, they confirm the lively communication not only between Slavic cultural and literary centers—Serbian, Bulgarian, Rus’—but also Greek (primarily Byzantine and Athosian) and Wallachian-Moldavian. They constitute an important and integral part of the Old Church Slavonic and Church Slavonic literature, and simultaneously, along with the so-called inscriptions, they form a somewhat separate, original strain of creativity.<sup>4</sup> As such, the genre was initially considered to be homogeneous from a genological, structural, thematic, or functional perspective; usually, it was also considered as a common and invariable historical message. Both forms—Church Slavonic (as well as non-Slavic) paratexts and inscriptions—number in, at least, the thousands; they appeared frequently in the oldest manuscripts and continued to show up in early printed books or, as in the case of inscriptions, on walls, frescoes, panels, and in other places that bore text.

Their extraordinary profusion, however, took place in the South Slavic area during the Ottoman period (late fourteenth to nineteenth centuries). At that time, countless paratexts with a clearly communicative function emerged as a particular specification of historical consciousness, comprising a distinctive type of cultural and social communication and a register of collective, communicative, and cultural memory.<sup>5</sup> This abundance, spurred by dramatic historical experiences, has also led many scholars to re-evaluate so-called writing and inscription literature and to consider it significant or even dominant in the Ottoman period in the Balkans.<sup>6</sup> At this point, it should be mentioned that this position largely results from the assessment of the condition of the southern Slavonic

literature at the time, which marked a clear weakening of grand literary genres (hagiographic and hymnographic) and a noticeable intensification and autonomization of these short literary forms. Thus, there was a slow change in the perception of the paratexts; they began to be considered as a separate literary genre, recognized as independent and original microworks, finally viewed as a unique phenomenon that was unprecedented in shape and number in other European cultural spheres and literary works.<sup>7</sup> Regardless of the provenance, structure, or theme, all paratexts should be appreciated from the functional perspective, which can be examined from the perspective of memorial and communication studies. They can be considered not only as carriers of cultural and social patterns and ideas but also as specific media with mnemonic and communicative purposes. As such, they reveal and update the past and, at the same time, transmit and describe the presence of a given community embedded in the historical, religious, political, cultural, and social space. The Church Slavonic paratexts created in the period of interest to us in the Balkans are also closely related to their Byzantine models, developed in the course of the centuries-old handwritten tradition and its subsequent adaptation and development on Slavic ground.

In terms of terminology and taxonomy, it is worth mentioning the Bulgarian scholarly tradition, where we can find two common terms used to denote all microworks: *pripiski* (annotations) and *beležki* (notes). Ivan N. Petrov draws attention to the definition of Bulgarian paratexts as “text additions outside the principal text of a given manuscript or early printed book.” He writes:

Their internal differentiation has been described by Božidar Rajkov. First, a class of primary annotations (Bulg. *pǎrvični*) from the author/scribe (and therefore also the publisher/printer) of a given book is distinguished, along with the class of secondary annotations (Bulg. *vtorični*) from third parties. This second group of additions, which is a source of valuable information about the history of the book, its changing owners, readers, or buyers, is most often described in the scholarly literature as provenance records. Rajkov's primary annotations are divided into two successive subclasses: basic (Bulg.

*osnovni*) and accompanying (Bulg. *sǎprovoždašti*). The former includes texts of a more official and normalized character (often containing fixed formulae) (e.g., commemorating the place and time of the book's creation, the name of the copyist [printer], information about the rulers or hierarchs of those times, etc.). This subclass of additions is found in forewords, afterwords, and colophons. The second group is represented by texts in which the circumstances accompanying the work on the book may be recorded (usually the so-called *marginalia* due to the place of their placement in the book) or comments on its individual fragments (e.g., *scholia* or *glosses*).<sup>8</sup>

It is worth recalling that in the scholarly discourse, there is also a rather simplified, although not unjustified, division of these short literary forms, which classifies them according to structural and periphrastic criteria and distinguishes between concise/attesting and extensive/descriptive (bracketed) paratexts. The first type, which is basically a colophon (a message about when, who, where, and on whose orders/behest a book was transcribed), can be treated as a kind of core for all paratexts. In most microforms that are narratively more extensive, this type is invariable, central, and almost obligatory because the remaining structural, pictorial, or descriptive elements concentrate around this core.<sup>9</sup> It is usually preceded by an elaborate invocation to God and the Holy Trinity or by an initial solemn phrase in honor of God, the Holy Trinity, the Mother of God, or other Christian or even local saints. In many cases, this first type of text is immediately followed by a description of the world at the time, historical facts important to the community, cultural artifacts, social events, natural or extraordinary phenomena, and so on. The entire narrative ends with a formula for either prayer or thanksgiving, usually of a doxological nature, or an interdictive formula. The latter often appears in the form of a pictorial, poetic, and emotionally charged “order”—in other words, a warning, whose basic substance is a curse. It serves to reinforce the statement and as an act of illocutionary and perlocutionary character: it expresses a very clear message prohibiting the violation of sanctity by taking, moving, selling, or stealing the manuscript or book from its site, the mother church or monastery.

Thus, although in this article we use the capacious and widespread in the English-language scholarly literature term “paratext,” which can be treated as a kind of invariant, our attention is focused primarily on paratexts belonging to the group of the previously mentioned basic primary additions (microworks), which include the extensive/descriptive ones.

## **Paratexts and Communication**

It should therefore be reiterated that short literary forms or miniatures appearing in the margins of many manuscripts and early printed books do not play only the standard role of colophons or side notes of codicological or paleographic significance but are often independent, highly artistic realizations of the genre and provide colorful, descriptive testimony to the history of a community. Many times they can also be regarded as evidence for the invariability of a particular perceptive pattern and way of describing reality, as well as for the communicativeness and durability of a cultural model or the manuscript and literary tradition. However, the peculiar separateness—a kind of formal and ideological autonomy of paratexts (literary asides)—does not exclude their basic function because in relation to the main works (mostly but not only liturgical texts), they invariably remain in a servile relationship. Essentially, they provide key information about the book itself, the time and place of its creation, its origin, copyists, and sponsors.

Moreover, by means of numerous universal motifs, epithets, artistic schemes, formulae, and phrases integrated into an ordered and descriptive whole, they communicate and illustrate a given reality, convey and present the binding axionormative order, and often express collective and individual attitudes, emotions, aspirations, and imaginings. As such, they should be considered not only as carriers of cultural and social patterns and ideas but also as specific communication media, whose functions can be defined by means of specific communication models, such as the model of information transmission—the transmission of meaning; the ritual or expressive model—the display and representation of communal beliefs and convictions; and the model of reception—the preferential coding of content.<sup>10</sup> These literary miniatures comprise a kind of communication in the margins, primarily

centered around the theme of copying, while secondarily transmitting and describing reality in a given historical, religious, political, or cultural-social space and time.

In relation to the so-called short forms, the cultural (especially literary) and social perspectives of communicating inside and outside a given community—religious, ethnic, cultural, or even creative and performative—is crucial. This perspective of contacting is identified not solely in terms of the transmission of information.<sup>11</sup> At this point, we ought to situate communication in its broadest sense in the so-called short literary forms, which are understood both as accompanying texts and as autonomous works, cultural texts, and forms of specific topical-communicative media. In terms of communication, these microworks can be discussed even in relation to the concept of history of the second degree (*histoire au second degré*), treated as a kind of “second-level” communicative media.<sup>12</sup> This specific way of articulating communication in these short literary forms does not imply diminution or marginalization, but it is meant to signal unusual, nonobvious, unique, or simply lesser-known aspects, as well as the implementation of cultural and social practices of much later provenance, characterized, among other ways, by communication models such as transmission, ritual/expression, publicity, or reception.

Among the possible paths of recognizing and marking the functions of microworks, the previous models of communication are highly useful, provided that their applicability is only conventional and, above all, taking into account the specificity of the structure and substance of the specific miniature literary work. Such works are topical in their communicative function, their raw material being a repetitive and thematically defined repertoire of universal motifs, figures, and ideas, while their components are also typically local ideological structures, often constituting a set of idioms legible only in a particular historical, political, religious, ecclesial, cultural (literary), and social context. The topicality of the structure of short literary forms serves both to describe reality and to communicate linguistically—and more broadly, culturally and socially—which, in fact, directly results from the basic connections between the topos itself and rhetoric as a practice of persuasion and communication. This topicality means a specifically ordered repertoire of so-called common locations (*loci*



*communes*) with a clearly communicative potential, assuming, after all, the existence of a community of senders and recipients with a common topical code, which contains a shared vision of the world, a common system of values, and so forth.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Repertoire of Topoi**

In the case of the Church Slavonic paratexts, it is worth noting the communicative diversity of the repertoire of topoi, some of which are strongly dependent on a given theme, such as the toil of rewriting (copying) a book, while others serve to delimit the text as exordial or final.<sup>14</sup> They all have a common informational function, however: they are carriers of specific cultural meanings established within the community. Taking into account the fixed composition of most paratexts, it can be said that some topoi are located in a peculiarly horizontal dimension—representing something or someone (such as a book, a copyist, or a benefactor, or a historical, political, or social circumstance)—and communicating about something (such as the copying of the book, the act of sacrifice, or the experience of suffering); others appear in a vertical communication system, comprising solemn invocations and laudatory phrases addressed to God and the Holy Trinity. Naturally, this division is not arbitrary because microworks can also include exordial topoi with a typically informative function, which cannot be placed in only one order, such as those that communicate by whose will, order, or with whose help a given book was created, transferred, or donated—be it God's, the hegumen's, or the benefactor's.

The classic initial formula, characteristic of the paratexts, is the hieratic invocation to God, which in the oldest Serbian, Bulgarian, Rus', and Slavic-Romanian microworks already occurs as an adaptation of the Greek apostrophe: “Glory to God the Perfect Creator, amen” (Τῷ συντελεστῇ τῶν ὅλων θεῷ χάρις ἀμήν).<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, over time, this formula expanded, largely under the impact of the biblical text itself but also of liturgical and literary works, transforming it into a theological and poetic exordium.<sup>16</sup>

Among the invocations that can be regarded as so-called exordial topoi or exordial topical constructions, there are also those that have a somewhat medial communicative status, namely they seem to combine functions belonging to transmission, ritual, and publicity models. They appear in the paratexts as poetic yet clearly informative and encoding formulae, which in the context of the Divine causation, highlight the consent, assistance, and participation of the Holy Trinity and the Mother of God in the rewriting of the books.

Many short literary forms have the aforementioned bracketed system, which is established by exordial and final topical constructions. The former reveal a vertical-horizontal direction of communication, while the latter are mostly vertical, determined primarily by their doxological character. But ideologically, structurally, and communicatively, they remain complementary to each other because usually the closure is a kind of amplified repetition of the introduction, such as: “By the will and with the help of God glorified in the Trinity, this book of the *Ladder*, ushering the soul towards salvation, has been completed ... Glory to God and the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, honor and glory to the majesty now and forever and ever.”<sup>17</sup> It is worth mentioning that such a compositional arrangement is characteristic not only of paratexts from the Orthodox Slavic area but also of Latin ones, as quite a few such examples can be found in Old Croatian Glagolitic manuscripts.<sup>18</sup>

The coherent or peculiarly iterative bracketed composition, though common, is not the only or obligatory layout of microworks because their final part often consists of prayerful-kenotic phrases or appeals to the audience—the subsequent (future) copyists or simply readers—pleading for forbearance and forgiveness for the mistakes made during the copying or of poetic formulae of curses meant as interdicts. In principle, the latter can be classified according to the formal-meaning criterium, but they can also be differentiated according to the presentation and communication model.<sup>19</sup> A component of these orders or warnings are fixed sequences of expression, such as “Whoever removes/extracts/appropriates a book from this church/from this monastery, let him be cursed/let him not be forgiven.”<sup>20</sup> In many paratexts, they form the core of the interdictive message, layered with further colorful and, above all, persuasive expressions. Particularly

interesting are those interdictive constructions that are extended by universal and very clear motifs, themes, and figures (like references to the Second Coming, the Last Judgment, God's wrath; warnings against the hostility/insensitivity of the Mother of God, as well as the cursing by prophets, Apostles, saints, and council fathers; admonitions against the shocking power of the Holy Cross; and warnings against Judas's complicity). As such, they constitute vivid and highly suggestive literary realizations and interactional cultural and social messages. They can all be grouped according to a semantic key, defined as examples of elaborate artistic imagery, and above all, treated as projections of beliefs and perceptions, summed up as a way of perceiving and valuing the world by the medieval Slavonic cultural and social community. Thus, the creators of paratexts communicate by means of connotations and signs, transmitting a certain axionormative order, displaying, for example, the sacred status of the book and the inviolability of the tradition associated with it. Furthermore, the senders of the message act as its guardians, predisposed or even anointed by God, and thus almost obligatorily respected and admired by a given group (the audience).

Naturally, at the center of the paratext message is a book with a peculiar double status, presented simultaneously as a medium of communication and as its content—the topos of a life-giving source, a reservoir of all benefits and salvation. In addition to its universal meaning, however, in the southern Slavic area during the Ottoman period, this media topos takes on a special dimension of rescuing and sustaining the cultural and literary tradition, which is an important factor in maintaining, integrating, and defining the identity of the Christian community. Almost every transcribed liturgical book is accompanied by an epithet, be it a fixed template (such as: “a holy and divine book,” “a holy and soul-saving book,” “for the glory of the Holy and Divine Trinity, for salvation and spiritual service,” “for the instruction of Christians”) or a text that is more poetically expanded (such as: “a holy book, for in it is the bread of Godly teaching”).<sup>21</sup> This topos is connected with many representational schemes rooted in culture and literature, the building blocks of which are usually a tangle of biblical references and cultural ideas that have grown out of them.

As a constant and obligatory component of the paratext message, the topos is closely correlated with the theme of writing/rewriting/copying and the presentation of rather arduous work in terms of creativity and mission. The writing effort is understood as the highest sacrifice and renunciation, which, at the same time, can reveal such traits and emotions as sinfulness, weakness, powerlessness, ineptitude, immaturity, or even dissatisfaction in the copyist.<sup>22</sup> The fundamental and obvious reference here is the dogma of the Incarnation—the kenosis of Christ—while the literary pattern is the medieval manner of writerly humility and fidelity. Thus, we can speak of a peculiar obsequious (servile) and acribic (meticulous, painstaking) topos, appearing as the realization of a universal ideological and expressive scheme, which, integrated with other representational constructs or even constituting their particular sum, functions as a clear strategy of communication—the imaging, perception, and exegesis of reality that is simultaneously literary, cultural, historical, political, religious, and social. In a kenotic atmosphere, the philological acriby is evident, testifying to a highly communicative consciousness and literary culture. Many times copyists refer to the source they used as a “pattern” or “model,” from which they “derived” and “transferred” a given text or translated it from one language to another.<sup>23</sup> This is accompanied by several linguistic problems and complications, about which the authors of the paratexts inform extensively, almost always in a humble yet bitter tone, through prayerful appeals for understanding and forgiveness. They often indicate the origin of the source used, emphasizing its correctness/exemplarity, indigenusness, or otherness and foreignness. Their statements strongly reflect traditional assumptions and aspirations to achieve adequacy, accuracy, and diligence, which sometimes even turns into a kind of writerly pedantry and obsession with correctness.<sup>24</sup> Beyond the dimension of the assumed mannerism, this lowly acribic topos also serves to communicate a great effort and predilection toward reliability and thus the preservation of invariability and a conscious continuation of the literary and scribal tradition.

In this role, copyists position themselves in a truly antithetical order, placing at stake the primacy of sources, on the one hand, and their own emphatically displayed ineptitude, incompetence, or immaturity, on the other. Their attitude can be interpreted not only in terms of affectation or

mannerism but also as a kind of transmittal and ritualized communication. They inform their recipients (including future copyists) about the difficulties of scribal work but also about the great responsibility of the task, seeking approval for their actions and, at the same time, postulating/persuading fidelity to old patterns and traditional attitudes. The copyists do not want publicity but recognition and solidarity in action. In addition to forbearance, they expect the continuation of manuscript efforts; in humble invocations, they transmit and present commonly shared beliefs. It is worth mentioning that these pleas for forgiveness or indulgence for the writer's shortcomings usually appear at the end of the microtexts, serving as a rhetorical cap and amplification of the utterance. Sometimes they can be found at the very beginning; embedded in the invocation to God, they make this motif, or even a certain sense of humility, even more significant.<sup>25</sup>

In short literary forms, creative humility expresses the connection between the central topics of the book and the rich repertoire of biblical references, ideas, and figures. Rewriting understood as voluntary sacrifice, renunciation, and suffering is reflected in many prayerful formulae and figurative expressions directly implementing the biblical message. A frequent communicative strategy is to evoke or, rather, to set writing activities in the context of, for example, the parable of the widow's offering (Mark 12:41–44), which usually appears in kenotic invocations. Sometimes the writer's effort is illustrated as sailing through the abyss of the sea, the overcoming of which—synonymous with rewriting the book—is only possible by God's Will, symbolized by a fortunate escape, calling at the port, or finding the desired land (Is. 51:10, 63:13; Ps. 68:15; 107:26–30); on one occasion, the copyist proclaims directly: “Thus writing, like a drowning man in the abyss of the sea, I long for peaceful land.”<sup>26</sup> Other times, through biblical figures and images, the transcriber compares the finale of laborious work with the falling of the waters and Noah's joy (Gen. 8:10–11), for example: “Just as Noah rejoiced when the dove brought him a sign to the ark that the waters were receding, so I, sinful, rejoiced when I, greatly sinful and poor, saw the end of this book.”<sup>27</sup> It should be added that this kind of imagery is not only characteristic of the Church Slavonic paratexts but also constitutes a characteristic expressive and descriptive construction of the Middle Ages, a strategy of comprehending, explaining, and

communicating about reality. Its presence in the discussed miniature works, therefore, proves the existence of a cultural (topical) community of sender and receiver and also confirms their belonging, integrity, and permanence in the system of Christian culture and literature, especially Eastern Christian and Church Slavonic.

The metaphorical constructions occurring in the paratexts, such as those strictly related to the myth of the Flood, reveal varied functionality over a broadly and concretely defined period. In the Ottoman period in the South Slavic region, in addition to the standard reference and ornamentation, these constructions serve both to communicate and to describe the dramatic circumstances of the time, which are frequently depicted as engulfing Christian culture and tradition, while the rewriting of the book signifies the anticipated rescue. Moreover, the motif of overcoming waves of difficulties and suffering is a constant element of the composition, serving both the exegesis of the tragic time and the fate of the community, as well as highlighting the writer's struggles, usually communicated with an accentuated sense of imperfection, frailty, and sinfulness and by a state of distress, uncertainty, and fear.

The mannerism of humility in the paratexts of the Ottoman period seems even more functional than before since it provides information about the tragic times in which the Christian community had to exist and the copyists had to work. In the prayerful appeals for understanding and forgiveness of scribal errors, there are emotional, descriptive, and clearly suggestive messages. The descriptive constructions, maintained in an apocalyptic tone, serve to highlight the dramatic historical situation and, at the same time, to emphasize the author's ability to overcome the hardship of the actions taken. The standard formula of humbleness thus gains an additional dimension, and the lowliness shown becomes a *de facto* display of humiliation, transforming into a signature of both individual and collective suffering.

In the southern Slavic Church Slavonic paratexts created in the Ottoman period, the message itself takes on distinctly descriptive features. Sometimes it transforms into a rather extensive statement about specific events and experiences, transmitting the dramatic political and cultural-social situation. The primary focus is on the theme of enslavement, and the subject of copying/rewriting the book becomes a pretext for describing the

reality of the time, whose leading figures are obviously the invaders and oppressors of the Christian community. It is then that the representation of the collective villain—the enemy and occupier—is perpetuated, while the image of the sacrificial community—the suffering people—crystallizes. Biblical references produce an almost infernal image of the Turks, most often called “Ishmaelites or Hagarites” (Gen. 16:11–12), “the cursed and godless Hagarite offspring,” “bloodthirsty wolves” (Ez. 22:27; Soph. 3:3; John 10:12; Acts 20:29), “wild lions” (Ez. 22:25; Ps. 57:5; 1 Pet. 5:8), and “winged vipers” (Is. 14:29).<sup>28</sup> The figure of the stranger, the evil one, the enemy, or the perpetrator becomes a component of the description of the tragic present; when included in the topical repertoire, it becomes a message through which the enslaved community expresses its disapproval and, at the same time, channels its submission to the tragic history. This figure allowed for a kind of historiosophical identification of Christians, who soon began to appear in the role of a sacrificial people—a lineage marked by the sacrifice perceived in the categories of the imitation of the New Testament Passion and the exemplification of the Old Testament punishment. Traditionally, the suffering of Christians was presented in the convention of the consequences of sin and disobedience, emphasized with the use of a highly functional phrase, characteristic of Eastern Christian literature—“by our sins”—which is one of the basic modes of exegesis of history.

Many paratextual accounts of dramatic events include the juxtaposition of the sinister Hagarite tribe and the afflicted people of God, who, stigmatized by sin, receive punishment. The reality of the time is transferred or even inscribed into biblical history, becoming its peculiarly variant illustration and the embodiment of its message. Biblical images and motifs are organized into deep, monumental, theological, and poetic narrative and communicative systems. The miseries of the Christians—the chosen people—are often presented as a repetition and continuation of Israel's destiny, while Turkish oppression is depicted as Egyptian bondage (Ex. 1:8–14), which the authors report explicitly, for example: “The greatest poverty and violence was sent upon our land, it seems to me no less oppression was inflicted then on the Christians than that which ancient Israel suffered in Egypt under Pharaoh.”<sup>29</sup> Usually the description, the core of which is a

reference to the hated, forcibly imposed Turkish power, remains at the level of biblical references, ideological constructs, phrases, and expressive patterns rooted in culture and literature, appearing as a testimony to the permanently tragic fate of the Orthodox (Slavic and non-Slavic) ecumene affected by the Turkish invasion and enslavement. It is characteristic of Church Slavonic paratexts from the Ottoman period to reference and describe the dramatic straits in which contemporary Christians find themselves. Miniature works become testimonies of the current state of the community in the broad sense and, at the same time, peculiar media of memory of past times associated with the greatness and freedom of individual nations.

## Conclusions

Similar to hagiographic or hymnographic texts, paratexts transmitting the past by employing particular times, motifs, images, and figures, recognizable to a given cultural model, serve as a kind of retrieval of the past through the “anchoring of memory,” as Pierre Nora points out.<sup>30</sup> The components of a given cultural model recalled in South Slavic microtexts are transformed into capacious “sites of memory” (*lieux de mémoire*).<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, the so-called short literary forms that use them are gaining in importance in literature because they describe and communicate reality, linking the present with the past, strongly embedding the latter in the current context. In this role, they appear as peculiar “crystallizing points of collective imaginary,” which, if only through the coupling of *loci* and *imagines*, shape the consciousness and memory, giving form to the identity and internal communication of the community.<sup>32</sup> As such, they can be considered not only as texts that comprise “marginal” (side) history but also as specific media of communication and memory that create a unique narrative on the formula of so-called second-degree history.

The communicative-memorial potential thus characterizes the abundant corpus of South Slavic short literary forms from the Ottoman period. It is also worth noting that the communicative function of the message does not always have to be so strongly coupled with the memorial one; it usually manifests itself simply in the broad transmission, presentation, and



encoding of the meaning of cultural heritage. Invariably, paratexts serve as the media of literary and cultural-social communication; even bearing the stigma of a tragic historical experience, they primarily attest—transmit, present, celebrate, and encode—the continuity of tradition, expressing community and a kind of unity of beliefs, convictions, and imaginations. It is worth emphasizing that our proposed memorial and communicative perspective of viewing medieval paratexts from the Balkans is only one of the possible approaches. A broad corpus of paratexts, both southern Church Slavonic and Byzantine, should be studied in many contexts, embedded in a broad humanistic and social reflection and conceptualized in an interdisciplinary and comparative way, by implementing methodological assumptions and tools from various scholarly fields.

## Notes

1. [This chapter has been written under the research project financed by the National Science Centre \(Poland\), decision number: DEC-2020/39/G/HS2/01652.](#)
2. [On the general theory of paratexts, see Gérard Genette, \*Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation\*, trans. Jane E. Lewin \(Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001\); H. J. Jackson, \*Marginalia: Readers Writing in Books\* \(New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001\). For examples of scholarship on South Slavic paratexts, see Vladimir Ćorović, \*Utjecaj i odnošaj između starih grčkih i srpskih zapisa i natpisa\* \[Influence and relationship between old Greek and Serbian records and inscriptions\] \(Belgrade: SKA, 1910\); Vladimir Ćorović, \*Uzajamne veze i uticaji kod starih slovenskih zapisa\* \[Mutual connections and influences in Old Slavonic records\] \(Belgrade: SKA, 1938\); Sima Ćirković and Rade Mihaljčić, \*Leksikon srpskog srednjeg veka\* \[Lexicon of the Serbian Middle Ages\] \(Belgrade: Knowledge, 1999\), 217–19; Rade Mihaljčić, \*Izborna vrednost stare srpske građe\* \[The original value of old Serbian material\] \(Belgrade: Knowledge, 2001\) 87–105; Đorđe Trifunović, \*Azbučnik srpskih srednjovekovnih književnih pojmova\* \[Lexicon of Serbian medieval literary terms\] \(Belgrade: Nolit, 1990\), 78–91; Veselin Panajotov, “Srednovekovni](#)

marginalni tekstove” [Medieval marginal texts], *Marginalii* (Šumen) 1 (1999): 5–48; Desislava Ivanova, “Elementi na pripiskata,” [Elements of marginal notes] *Marginalii* (Šumen) 1 (1999): 49–83; Desislava Ivanova, “Slavjanski marginalni tekstove” [Slavic marginal texts] (PhD diss., Šumenski universitet “Episkop Konstantin Preslavski”, 2003); Maja Koseva, “Pripiskite: živjana istorija, želana istorija. Pripiskite za osmanskoto našestvie kato mesta na pametta” [Colophons—lived history and desired history. Marginal notes about the Ottoman invasion as memory places], in *Fakti i mistifikacii v starite tekstove* [Facts and mystifications in the old texts], eds. Borjana Hristova and Elena Uzunova (Sofia: Gutenberg, 2011), 59–73; Danko Georgiev, “Paremiologičeski žanrovi formi v srednovekovnite paratekstove” [Paremiological genre forms in the medieval paratexts], *Marginalii* (Šumen) 3 (2017): 1-212. Tatiana N. Nikolova-Houston, “Margins and Marginality: Marginalia and Colophons in South Slavic Manuscripts during the Ottoman period, 1393–1878” (PhD diss., University Texas at Austin, 2008), <https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/handle/2152/3970>; Tatiana Nikolova-Houston, “Marginalia and Colophons in Bulgarian Manuscripts and Early Printed Books,” *Journal of Religious and Theological Information* 8, nos. 1–2 (2009): 65–91; Mary-Allen Johnson, “Perspectives on Space, Signatures, Colophons and Inscriptions” (With some examples from Medieval Slavic Old Testament lectionaries), in *Medieval Slavonic Studies: New Perspectives for Research*, eds. Juan Antonio Álvarez-Pedrosa and Susana Torres Prieto (Paris: Institut d’études slaves, 2009), 97–113; Kristina Nikolovska, “‘When the Living Envied the Dead’: Church Slavonic Paratexts and Theapocalyptic Framework of Monk Isaija's Colophon (1371) in Tracing Manuscripts in Time and Space through Paratexts,” in *Studies in Manuscript Cultures*, eds. Giovanni Ciotti and Hang Lin, 7 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 185–221; Kristina Nikolovska, “‘Tsar or Son of Perdition’: South Slavic Representation of Ottoman Imperial Authority in Church Slavonic Paratextual Accounts,” *Revue des études sud-est européennes* 54, nos. 1–4 (2016): 75–86; Kristina Nikolovska, “‘Let It Be Known’: Interrogating Historical Writing in Church Slavonic Paratexts of Southeastern Europe (1371–1711)” (PhD diss., University of Kent / Free University

- of Berlin, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.22024/UniKent/01.02.53887>; Kristina Nikolovska, “From Margins to Nation: Church Slavonic Marginal Inscriptions and Their Value as Historical Sources for Macedonian Historiography,” *New Europe College Yearbook* (2015–16, 2016–17): 25–42; Kristina Nikolovska, “Texts or Paratexts: On the Liminality of the South Slavic Marginalia from the Early Modern Period,” *Journal of Contemporary Philology*, SS. Cyril and Methodius University, B. Koneski Faculty of Philology 1, no. 3 (2020): 97–110; Konrad Petrovsky, “Marginal Notes in South Slavic Written Culture. Between Practicing Memory and Accounting for the Self,” *Cahiers du monde russe*, 58, no. 3 (2017): 483–502, <https://doi.org/10.4000/monderusse.10106>.
3. See [Ljubomir Stojanović, \*Stari srpski zapisi i natpisi\* \[Old Serbian records and inscriptions\], vols. 1–6. \(Belgrade: Državna štamparija kraljevine Srbije—Sremski Karoljci: Srpska manastirska štamparija, 1902–26, repr., 1982–87\); Vladimir R. Petković, \*Starine, zapisi, natpisi, listine\* \[Antiquities, records, inscriptions, documents\] \(Belgrade: Izdavačka Knjižarnica Napredak, 1923\); Ivan Gošev, “Stari zapiski i nadpisi: istoričeski, liturgiĉeski i bibliografiĉeski zapiski i tekstove” \[Old marginalia and epigraphy: Historical, liturgical, and bibliographical marginalia and texts\], \*Godišnik na Sofijskija universitet. Bogoslovski fakultet\*, 4 \(1927\): 335–78; 6 \(1929\): 1–36; 12 \(1935\): 1–50; 13 \(1936\): 1–58; 14 \(1937\): 1–50; Đorđe. Sp. Radojĉić, \*Antologija stare srpske književnosti \(XI–XVIII\)\* \[Anthology of Old Serbian literature \(XI–XVIII\)\] \(Belgrade: Nolit, 1960\); Đorđe Trifunović, \*Iz tmine pojanje: Stari srpski pesniĉki zapisi\* \[Singing out of the darkness: Old Serbian poetic records\] \(Belgrade: Nolit, 1962\); Radmila Ugrinowska-Skalovska, ed., \*Zapisi i letopisi\* \[Records and annals\] \(Skopje: Makedonska kniga, 1975\); Nikola Fermandžiev and Venceslav Naĉev, eds., \*Pisahme da se znae: Pripiski i letopisi\* \[We wrote to let others know: Records and chronicles\] \(Sofia: Oteĉestven front, 1984\); Milorad Pavić, \*Stari srpski zapisi i natpisi\* \[Old Serbian records and inscriptions\] \(Belgrade: Prosveta 1986\); Petar Momirović, \*Stari srpski zapisi i natpisi iz Vojvodine\* \[Old Serbian records and inscriptions from Vojvodina\], vols. 1–6 \(Novi Sad: Matica Srpska, 1993–2004\); Božidar. Šekularac, \*Tragovi prošlosti Crne Gore:\*](#)

- Srednjovjekovni zapisi i natpisi u Crnoj Gori, kraj VIII–početak XVI vijeka* [Medieval records and inscriptions in Montenegro, the end of the 8th to the beginning of the 16th centuries] (Cetinje: Istorijski institut Crne Gore, 1994); Nadežda R. Sindik, ed., *Izdavači, stampari, prepisivači* [Editors, printers and copyists] (Cetinje: Obod, 1996); Gjorgi Pop-Atanasov, ed., *Stari zapisi* [Old records] (Skopje: Menora, 1996); Ilija Velev, ed., *Zapisi i natpisi od lesnovskiot kniževen centar* (Skopje: Institut za makedonska literatura, 2001); Borjana Hristova, Darinka Karadžova, and Elena Uzunova, *Beležki na bǎlgarskite knižovnici X–XVIII vek* [Marginalia of Bulgarian scribes, 10th to 18th centuries], vols. 1–2 (Sofia: Narodna biblioteka “Sv. sv. Kiril i Metodij”, 2003–4); Ivan N. Petrov, *Od inkunabułow do pierwszych gramatyk: Konteksty rozwoju bułgarskiego języka literackiego (koniec XV–początek XVII wieku)* [From incunabula to the first grammars: Contexts for the development of the Bulgarian literary language (late 15th–early 17th centuries)], trans. Aleksander Naumow (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2015), 199–260.
4. See Yavor Miltenov, “Za njakoi redki dumi v “marginalnite” pismeni svidetelstva ot X–XI v.,” [On some rare words in “marginal” written evidence from the 10th–11th centuries], in *Dokladi ot Meždunarodnata godišna konferencija na Instituta za bǎlgarski ezik “Prof. Ljubomir Andrejčin,”* eds. Svetla Koeva and Maksim Stamenov (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na BAN, 2022), 291.
  5. See Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2013).
  6. Mihaljčić, *Izvorna vrednost*, 87–105.
  7. Trifunović, *Azbučnik srpskih srednjovekovnih književnih pojmova*, 78–90; Izabela Lis-Wielgosz, *O trwałości znaczeń: Siedemnastowieczna literatura serbska w służbie tradycji* [On permanence of meanings: The Serbian literature of the seventeenth century in service with tradition] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2013), 179–211.
  8. Ivan N. Petrov, *The Development of the Bulgarian Literary Language: From Incunabula to First Grammars, Late Fifteenth–Early Seventeenth Century*, trans. Marek Majer and Katarzyna Gucio (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2021), 58–59. For more details, see Božidar

- Rajkov, “Pripiskite v sistemata na starata bǎlgarska knižnina” [Colophons in the system of Old Bulgarian literature], *Palaeobulgarica* 16, no. 2 (1992): 38–49; Hristova, Karadžova, and Uzunova, *Beležkite na bǎlgarskite knižovnici*, 3–22. For a work polemicizing with Rajkov's views, see Veselin Panajotov, “Vǎzgliedǎt na B. Rajkov za marginaliite i negovoto vlijanie vǎrhu dnešnite publikacii” [B. Raikov's view on marginalia and its influence on contemporary publications], *Marginalii* (Šumen) 2 (2005): 73–95.
9. Ćorović, *Utjecaj i odnošaj*, 4.
  10. See, e.g., Michał Wendland, “Działanie komunikacyjne a przekazywanie informacji” [Communication activity and information transfer], in *Komunikologia: Teoria i praktyka komunikacji*, eds. Emanuel Kulczycki and M. Wendland (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Instytutu Filozofii UAM, 2012), 137–48.
  11. Wendland, *Działanie komunikacyjne*, 137–48.
  12. On *histoire au second degré*, see Pierre Nora, ed., *Les lieux de mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), 1:19–21; Pierre Nora, “Pour une *histoire au second degré*,” *Le Débat* 122 (2002): 24–31; Kornelia Kończal, “Bliskie spotkania z historią drugiego stopnia” [Close encounters with history of the second degree], in *Pamięć zbiorowa jako czynnik integracji i źródło konfliktów*, ed. Andrzej Szpociński. (Warsaw: Scholar, 2009), 207–26.
  13. Janina Abramowska, “Topos i niektóre miejsca wspólne badań literackich” [The Topos and some Loci communes of literary studies], *Pamiętnik Literacki* 73, nos. 1–2 (1982): 3–23.
  14. Note: *Ibid.*, 13–14.
  15. Quoted in Ćorović, *Uzajamne veze*, 105–6.
  16. See *ibid.*, 111.
  17. Stojanović, *Stari srpski zapisi*, no. 1426.
  18. See Ćorović, *Uzajamne veze*, 120–21.
  19. See Ćorović, *Utjecaj i odnošaj*, 37–41; Ćorović, *Uzajamne veze*, 153–56.
  20. Stojanović, *Stari srpski zapisi*, nos. 297, 917, 4322, 4421, 4323, 4346.
  21. Note: *Ibid.*, nos. 1021, 1132, 1404, 1107, 1502, 1449.
  22. See, e.g., Mariola Walczak-Mikołajczakowa, “Co pisano o pisaniu? (Na materiale średniowiecznych glos i marginaliów w bułgarskich

- zabytkach piśmiennictwa” [What was written about writing? (On the material of medieval glosses and marginal notations in Old Bulgarian literature)], *Zeszyty Cyrylo-Methodiańskie (Lublin) 6* (2017): 16–24.
23. See Đura Daničić, *Rječnik iz književnih starina srpskih* [Dictionary of Serbian literary antiquities] (Belgrade: Knjažesko Srpska Knjigopečatnja, 1863), 1:394–95: (reprint: Graz: Akademische Druck - U. Verlagsanstalt, 1962).
  24. Stanoje Stanojević, “Akribija kod naših starih pisaca” [The meticulousness of our old writers], *Jugoslovenski istorijski časopis 3* (1937): 107–17.
  25. See, e.g., Stojanović, *Stari srpski zapisi*, no. 2328.
  26. Note: *Ibid.*, nos. 6635.
  27. Note: *Ibid.*, no. 1050, 903, 2051.
  28. Note: *Ibid.*, nos. 1039, 1796, 1691, 1467, 1824.
  29. Note: *Ibid.*, no. 1466.
  30. Nora, *Lieux de mémoire*, xix–xxi.
  31. Note: *Ibid.*; see also Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*.
  32. Kończal, *Bliskie spotkania*, 213. See also Frances Amelia Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

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